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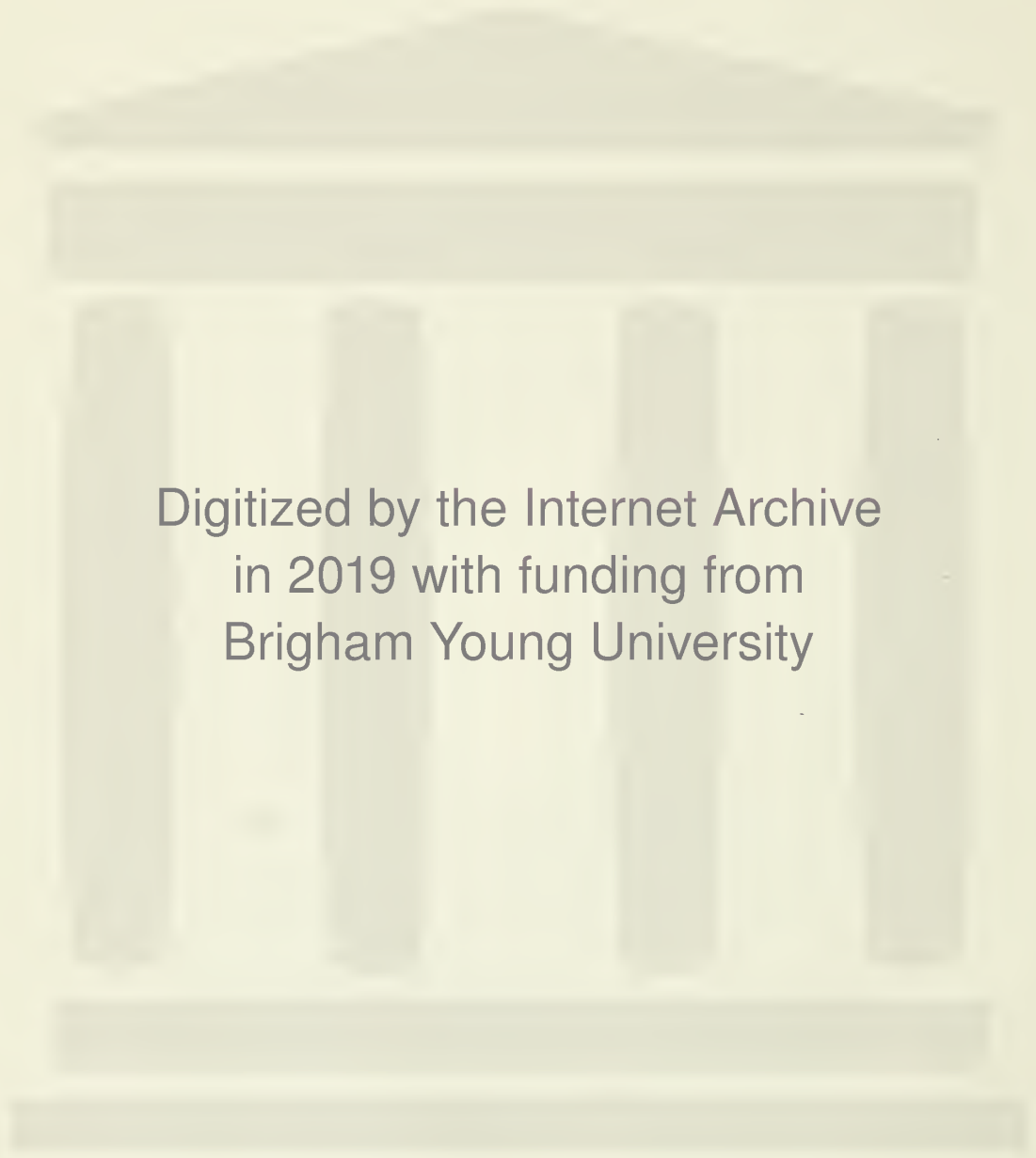
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THE GREAT BASIN BEFORE THE COMING
OF THE MORMONS

BY

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M. A. (UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA), 1922.

A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL SATISFACTION OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

1923

APPROVAL:

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

Not as a mere matter of formality but with sincere appreciation are the following acknowledgements made. The theme for this study was suggested by the writer Dr. Herbert E. Bolton, who gave it immediate attention and subsequent approval. Continuously as the thesis progressed, Dr. Bolton rendered invaluable aid in the way of helpful suggestions and wholesome encouragement. To Dr. L. J. Paetow I am particularly indebted for aid in historical method and research. To all my teachers who have patiently cooperated with me I am duly grateful. My associate Teaching Fellows and graduate students will be pleasantly remembered for their uniform kindness. Mr. J. J. Hill and the assistants in the Bancroft Library have been unusually courteous and helpful in making easily accessible to me all available materials. Finally my deepest debt of gratitude is due my wife, without whose unfailing sacrifice, encouragement and aid, this thesis never would have been completed.

INTRODUCTION.

The history of early explorations in the Great Basin region has never been written save in a fragmentary way in connection with history of states lying wholly or partly within it, and in works of a general character. Perhaps the nearest approach to a study of this region as an independent locality, is that of Captain J. H. Simpson made in behalf of the war department in 1859.¹ This valuable historical survey and report is official and neglects entirely the work of fur companies and detached free traders and trappers. While it is restricted in subject matter to government explorations and scientific information concerning this particular section, it is extended in time beyond the period to be covered by this narrative.

It will, then, be the purpose of this brief study to isolate the field and limit the time to what is sometimes spoken of as prepioneering days. That is, there has been a prevailing notion that the Mormons were the pioneers in the Great Basin. They were so far as permanent settlements are concerned, but they were preceded by a band of path finders, the importance of whose work has been overlooked. To this earlier development attention will be directed.

The discussion that follows will have a three fold purpose; First, the aim will be to assemble the fragmentary facts concerning the first discoveries and early explorations in this vast inland basin region, and create a new historical synthesis in which the Great Basin, rather

1. J. H. Simpson (Colonel of Engineers U. S. Army)
Report of Exploration across the Great Basin of the territory of
Utah for a direct wagon route from Camp Floyd to Genoa in Carson Valley.
Made in 1859. Washington Government Printing Office, 1876.

than being a mere incident in some larger theme will be the center of interest. Second, an effort will be made to exhibit the rugged character and courage of a class of frontiersmen who, but for the power of history to rescue from the "widespread, insatiable maw of oblivion," would soon pass into ill deserved obscurity, and, withal, be deprived of the well merited honor of paving the way for many of the achievements fostered by the National Government and made secure by the colonizers. And last but by no means least, it will be shown that in reality there is no such thing as isolated history, that in fact local history in all the sections of America, is not only an expression of restlessness and discontent in older settled communities, but a phase of international rivalry in the expansion of Europe to America.

This broader outlook revitalizes American expansion, and emphasized the fact that in every movement westward to continuously receding frontiers something more than local interest arises. In fact it becomes increasingly evident that United States history merges into and becomes a part of European history at every stage of advance. The Old West, the Old Southwest, the Northwest, the Trans-Mississippi West, the Rocky Mountain and Pacific slope area, all are interwoven with that four hundred year struggle for the continent of America - a struggle that is not yet over.

The New England school of historians neglected or failed to see this aspect of our history. In fact most historians since have failed to exhibit this larger view. Even those who have written of our western development, and who have explained such in connection with our national life and distinctive American ideals have largely localized their fields to the neglect of this wider perspective.

It is proper to state at this point, what it is believed will be generally conceded, that Dr. Herbert Eugene Bolton, of the University of California is the Nester of this new school of thought. He has done and is doing much to lift the history of colonization in America from the narrow provincialism of the past into the broader and truer setting of conflicting international aims and struggles. Under this broadening interpretation, the facts glow with new meaning and light, and lose nothing in local intensity and value.

The Great Basin history is no exception to, but another illustration of this later method of interpretation. It will be recalled that it belonged to Spain until after the Spanish-American Revolutions, 1819-1821, and to Mexico for more than a quarter of a century later. Early American explorations within it were therefore made on territory belonging to Spain or Mexico. Even when the Momons took possession of Salt Lake Valley in the name of the United States the region nominally belonged to Mexico. As is usual, however, exploration and actual occupation are the arbiters of ownership and precursors of empire.

But there is another aspect of the case even more significant. The northern rim of the Basin extended into the Oregon territory so long in dispute between the United States and England. For a long time the advantage seemed to be and was on the side of England whose traders and trappers came down from the north and pretty well monopolized the Columbia river basin.

The United States in driving her wedge of advance between Spanish and British territory found the Rockies a formidable barrier. This difficulty was largely overcome by the discovery of the South Pass. Hence considerable emphasis is given to this discovery of the Ashley men in

1824. It gave not only an impetu to activities beyond the international boundary line of 106 west and 42 north, that is in the Utah Green river region and the Great Basin, but it also made it possible for the Americans once more to enter into competition with the Great Hudson Bay Company which had but three years before absorbed the Northwest Company. In brief it opened up an accessible wagon route over which emigrant trains, following the path of the trader, later traveled both to the Oregon country and the Great Basin and on to California.

In assembling the facts and seeking to achieve the foregoing purposes, some digression in the field of individual adventure has been indulged, and some narratives rehearsed, that might at first thought be considered extraneous, but which allow certain characters who are to figure prominently at a later period, to disclose themselves through action. No biographical sketch, no character delineation, can equal man himself, exhibiting alone and in obscurity, and therefore, unsupported by the applauding multitude, that self mastery and unflinching courage which condition all worthy achievements. This is the justification for repeating some thrilling episodes in the lives of Jedediah S. Smith, Hugh Glass, and others. Too often in the past kings, rulers, generals, knights, etc. have held the center of the stage as against the average man. Is it not time that common men who do uncommon things shall be given attention as against uncommon men who do common place things? Many of the rugged unpolished frontiersmen are of the former type. The memory of these unpretentious characters should be preserved by those who follow where they trod, and reap the reward of their courageous sacrifices.

One other matter in anticipation of what follows. The Mormon exodus was an outgrowth of the westward movement and a sequence of fur trading activities, and official exploration in the Great Basin. This close connection is shown in the concluding chapter.

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CHAPTER I

THE OPENING OF THE GREAT BASIN FROM SANTA FE AS A BASE

For long centuries the region beyond the Rockies, known since Fremont's survey in 1843 as the Great Basin, lay as a great unfathomed wilderness, unknown and untrodden save by the savages and wild beasts that haunted its valleys and weird canons, or howled in its desolate deserts. To the white man penetrating the regions fronting it south, and east, and north, it possessed no magic Amazons, no Seven Cities, no metas, no gilded men. By those who approached its mountain or desert barriers, it appeared merely a great white stretch of horizon, inviting only because of its blank mystery. It might appropriately be called the "Dark Continent" of America. It thus remained until the latter half of the eighteenth century, and when it was discovered it was not in itself an object of interest and adventure, but rather an obstruction in the pathway of a goal beyond. How to get through it or over it to California was the important problem to be solved.

And certainly this vast area might appropriately be called a continent. It was truly an obstacle in the path of quick and direct communication between New Mexico and California, between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Coast. Lying approximately between the 111th and 121st meridians of west longitude and the 34th and 43rd parallels of north latitude, it covers an area of some two hundred and ten thousand square miles, and represents distances from the extreme points north and south, and east and west, of about nine hundred and ¹ six hundred miles respectively. Upon this area the German Empire might be placed leaving room around the fringes for automobile boulevards and strategic railways.

1. Gilbert gives the extreme length as 880 miles and greatest width 572 miles, area 210,000 sq. miles. Grove Karl Gilbert "Lake Bonneville" in U.S. Geological Survey, J. W. Powell, Director, Washington, D. C., 1879.

Not only its size but its topography, too, made travel over it dangerous and difficult. Vast deserts and rugged mountains hedged the way of the traveler and threatened his destruction by thirst or starvation, or at the hands of lurking savages. In the absence of railroads and other modern adjuncts of travel and communication it seemed an almost impossible barrier. Yet venturesome hunters allowed no barrier to stand long between them and their goal of enterprise.

While Fremont designated it the Great Basin and it has been so called ever since, its configuration is very irregular, varying in the altitude of its valleys and plains from below sea level to nine thousand feet above, and being specked quite generally by hills and mountains ranging as high as thirteen thousand feet. The great desert of southwestern Utah and the Nevada deserts constitute the most desolate and monotonous stretches.

As this whole area has no outlet to the sea, and as there are many rivers running into it, some of them comparatively large, there are numerous lakes of varying size, Great Salt Lake being the largest. The leading or most important rivers are the Humboldt, losing itself at the base of the Sierras, the Bear, the Weber, the Jordan, running into Salt Lake, and Provo and several others running into the Utah Lake, and the Sevier emptying into the Sevier Lake.

As suggested, this region was in the way of traffic. It offered little inducement in itself. No one dreamed of its latent resources at this early date. It was not seen that out of it would be carved the state of Nevada, a large portion of the State of Utah, and parts of Oregon, Idaho, and California. There was no one to prophesy of its agricultural possibilities, based upon irrigation and scientific dry farming. Nor could its invisible wealth of iron, and coal, and oil and nitrates, and precious metals be

projected before the wealth seeker and empire builder of this period. It
2
may have excited their curiosity but its chief interest was not in its
potential wealth but in finding a way through it to California and the
Pacific.

Perhaps the foregoing statements need slight qualification. The
search for peltries even more than the search for gold or mystic cities,
furnishes the key to the movement westward from the Hudson Bay, the St.
Lawrence Basin, and even from the Alleghanies clear across the continent
to the Pacific. And so in this instance Spanish fur traders in the
Southwest did push up the western tributaries of the Colorado into the
San Juan River and Grand Valley and possibly over the divide into the
Inland Basin. These expeditions were unofficial, were carried out by
free trappers or traders, and were localized in the regions named, and
were, therefore, not incidental to ulterior objectives. On the whole,
however, the assertion holds that the Basin region did not become of in-
terest in itself until the first half of the 19th century.

A combination of circumstances brought this section into the fore-
ground in the 18th century. Russia's advance to the Pacific Coast from
the west and England's penetration of the same region from the east by
land and along the coast by water, forced upon Spain the necessity of
vigorous action to save California from her rivals. She had settled
Alta California 1769-1774, approaching it first by sailing up the coast.
The portola expedition moved from San Diego up the coast both by land and
by sea. The need of an overland route from the Spanish base in Mexico
was a growing necessity. The route followed by Anza in his successful
trips from Sonora to California in 1774 and in 1775-1776 was not

2. Much curiosity was aroused concerning an imaginary river which ran through
the basin and mountains to the Pacific. It was hoped this would provide an

by any means satisfactory. The Colorado desert was an obstruction to be seriously considered. But even though that way should prove reasonably accessible, direct communication between Monterey and New Mexico would be highly desirable. This need became more urgent as the competition between Spain and her enemies grew more intense.

Opportunely for Spain at this period, Charles III, one of the strongest and ablest rulers since Isabel or Phillip II, was at the helm directing affairs of state. He sent to New Spain, Jose de Galvez, a man whose energy and executive capacity reflected that of his chief. In his new role of visitador general he promoted the expeditions to Alta California resulting in the discovery of Monterey and San Francisco, and he spared no pains in making permanent and secure and prosperous withal, the interests of Spain in all parts of her American realm.

THE DOMINGUEZ-ESCALANTE EXPEDITION

1776-1777

In line with this general thought and to meet the special need of supporting more directly Alta California, the Dominguez-Escalante expedition was organized. The company consisted of ten including the two fathers. While the prime and official purpose was, as previously indicated, to discover a route to Monterey, the fathers were actuated by the usual missionary zeal, and were therefore anxious to establish closer contact with the indians of the northwest and perchance establish missions among them. They were in fact willing to place themselves in the hands of God and accept whatever results came of their enterprise. If the desired trail could be opened up the Lord

accessible road west of the Rocky Mountains to Monterey. Dominguez and Escalante anxiously inquired of the Indians concerning this river.

be praised, but in any event they were in His hands, willing to be guided by His inspiration. Such was the spirit of Dominguez and Escalante, if not³ of the other members of the company.

It was midsummer, July 29, 1776, when the little band left Santa Fe, and less than two months later, Sept. 21, they crossed the divide and caught a vision of the region beyond. Two days later they were in the valley below near the shores of the present Utah Lake. They were thus the first white men known to have entered the heart of the Basin. The trappers and traders of whom mention has been made, had perhaps, up to this time, confined their activities to the region east of the divide and south of the Gunnison River. The Anza route from Sonora to California lay near the border of the southern rim of the Basin, but no penetration of it followed. For practical purposes then, the credit for opening this region and describing some of its essential characteristics belongs to the Escalante party. Failure though it was, viewed as an attempt to find a route to Monterey, it was, nevertheless, a great success, judged in the light of the discoveries made. As a mere feat of exploration it is another manifestation of that restless and adventurous spirit which gave to the Spaniards such a high rank as pioneers.

The route followed during the first month led over fairly familiar ground. At least one of their number, the interpreter, Andres Munez, had been over it once or twice before. Probably others of the party were acquainted with certain parts of it. After reaching villages of the Sabuaganas Yutas on the North Fork of the Gunnison, however, they had to pioneer their way over territory

3. See pleadings of the fathers with disaffected members of the group. Oct. 11th and at sundry times, in Dean Harris translation of the Escalante Journals in his The Catholic Church in Utah, pp. 194-195 and passim.

never before, so far as known, explored by white man. But they received new impetus here by reason of meeting with Timpanogas or Lagunas Indians "to whose country" they were intending to go, and among whom they desired to establish missions. Moreover, they secured two Lagunas as guides, and thus nerved and equipped for the long journey ahead, they commenced the march, leaving the Indian village September 2.

Their course from this point was generally northwest across the Grand and White Rivers, and west to the Green River, called by them the San Buenaventura, to Brush Creek near the present site of Jensen, Utah. After fording Green River they seem to have travelled a little south of west to the junction of Uintah and Duchesne Rivers. The journal descriptions of the journey from here on up the Duchesne to its junction with the strawberry where the town of Duchesne is now located, and from thence through the Strawberry Valley over the summit, down Diamond Fork and Spanish Fork Rivers to Utah Lake, are particularly explicit and suggestive. In fact, to one who is familiar with the topography of the region described there is a sort of "at homeness" feeling in reading Escalante's Journal.

This holds true, too, of the details given of the trip clear through Utah to the Colorado. There seems to be little difficulty in identifying most of the significant places described. However, in certain minor details and cross wanderings one is likely to be puzzled in an attempt at physiographic identification. Bancroft and the historians following him made the mistake of bringing the party down Provo River to Utah Lake rather than down the Spanish Fork River. Dean Harris corrected this error, but

made some others that are almost equally palpable. Mr. J. J. Hill, assistant librarian in the Bancroft Library, and Miss Jessie Hazel Power, graduate student U.C. 1920, have made the most thorough examination yet given to this particular matter, and the results of their research seem, on the whole, well sustained.

Escalante's record in some cases is so vivid in detail that one almost feels that the experiences related are his own. The catching of the two pound trout in the Strawberry waters is typical of incidents repeated many times since. Indeed each summer now in the fishing season, many such trout are

4. At this point I want to confess my indebtedness for all the essential particulars of this chapter to Mr. J. J. Hill, assistant librarian in the Bancroft library, and Miss Jessie Hazel Power, whose Master's thesis presented at the U. C. 1920, covers in a masterly way the Dominguez-Escalante expedition of 1776-1777. Mr. Hill's article, "The Old Spanish Trail", appearing in the Hispanic American Historical Review for August, 1921, and reprinted in Pamphlet form, is a careful piece of research on the subject investigated, and throws particular light on Escalante's route into the Basin. Miss Power gives an excellent translation of the Escalante journals, and prefaces her translation with an illuminating introduction. I have drawn freely from both these studies without citation save in a few specific cases. This acknowledgment will place the credit where it belongs.

It is but proper to state, however, that I have gone back to the Escalante journals, that is, the translations of them made by Miss Power, and also by Dean Harris in his "Catholic Church in Utah" and made comparisons of the originals and the conclusions drawn from them. Much of the route traveled over by Escalante after leaving Green River at or near the present site of Jensen, Utah, I have traveled over and can support conclusions of Mr. Hill and Miss Power, on the basis of at least a certain degree of familiarity with the country. Measuring the original journal account in the light of individual observations over the area drained by the Uintah, Duchesne and Strawberry Rivers, and the streams running through Utah Valley where I have lived for years, I can express independent judgment of approval of the fundamental contentions of both Mr. Hill and Miss Power with reference to the route of Escalante into and through the Utah Basin.

The data concerning expeditions into the Basin after Escalante are furnished by Mr. Hill in article cited. Some of these disclosures represent new material resulting from Mr. Hill's research. These I accept as valuable contributions.

caught by the anglers that spend their vacation in this delightful region. Moreover, the good pasture, the fertile soil, the fresh water springs all are being utilized, and the villages of which Escalante saw visions, are springing up. Perhaps there is no better summer range for cattle in the whole inter-mountain country than this very region today, and as a fishing resort, it attracts each season hundreds of modern "Ike Waltons".

Coming now to Utah Valley, his words are equally significant and even more prophetic. He locates the valley most accurately, describes the four main rivers running through it, gives description of the climate that is typical, approximates closely the size of the lake (he makes it a little too large), portrays the characteristics of the Timpanogos indians, and withal describes the fertility of the river valleys in a way that would do credit to the real estate boosters who now reside there, and who designate their city as the Garden City of Utah. In summing up his conclusions, Escalante declared that the region around the lake would permit of as many pueblos as there were then in New Mexico. The prediction is more than realized, for now the valley of the Yutas is a swarm of prosperous villages in close proximity to one another.

Before leaving the Yutas, the Spaniards learned of a lake farther north. The description of this Lake as given by the Indians compels the conclusion that it was Great Salt Lake. Although they did not visit it, they carried with them geographical knowledge of considerable importance.

Resuming their journey after a three day sojourn with the Indians east of the lake, the party traveled southwest. Much of the country through which they passed en route to southern Utah was described with an accuracy of detail equal to that given of Utah and Strawberry valleys. In the Valle de las Salinas (the Valley of the Salt Pits) the Spanish name still survives in the town of Salina, rock salt abounds over a large area, and from the time of the earliest settlers, has consti-

tuted an important article of trade. Wagon loads of it have been hauled and are still being hauled to the surrounding settlements where it is purchased for cattle. Every home yard is supplied with it, and cattle men put large quantities of it on their ranches.

On reaching Santa Isabel (Sevier) River, which they came upon rather unexpectedly, they found bearded Indians, and gave an accurate description of them. This was important as furnishing a means of identifying the routes of future explorers who spoke of these Indians as the Bearded Yutas.

With their eyes still set upon Monterey as a goal, they continued their journey south and southwest, travelling part of the distance at least on the route now followed by the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad. Upon reaching the vicinity where the valley begins to widen into what is now termed the Escalante desert, or the desert, a series of circumstances occurred to discourage them from their original purpose. First, their Laguna guide who had accompanied them from Utah Lake took umbrage at some over-zealous admonitions of one of the padres and peremptorily left them. It was now October, and winter began to announce its approach by blinding snow storms. For several days they were unable to leave camp. An unfavorable report from the scouting party sent out to find, if possible, an opening westward through the Sierras, still further chilled their enthusiasm for their western journey.

Finally they held council, considered the situation in its various aspects and concluded to discover the will of the Lord in the matter by casting lots. If Providence, through the lot, said go on they would go, if not, they would bow in submission. The decision by whatever power controlled, or by pure chance as the case may be, was for returning home. To the padres this seemed entirely satisfactory but to others of the company it looked like surrender to failure. Dissent and ill will in the little company resulted, but the resolution to return remained unchanged.

But relief from anxiety did not by any means follow. They were now without any guide and the country before them was entirely unknown until they reached the Colorado Basin. They pushed out into the desert and on a small hill gazed over the desolate desert plain before them. They rightly estimated (a very close approximation) that the distance to the southwest where the snow-capped mountains fringed the rim of the basin was thirty-five or forty leagues. They resisted therefore, the temptation to go in that direction, turned their course south near the fringe of the eastern hill, passed through Cedar Valley down Ash Creek and across the Virgin to the high Colorado Plateau, and finally after a month's wandering east, northeast, crossed the Colorado at a point which has since been known as⁵ the "Crossing of the Fathers." It was Jan. 2, 1777 before they finally reached

5. I am making these observations upon the assumption that the route followed is that marked out by Miss Power in the thesis previously referred to. It should be said here that the route taken after the decision to return to Santa Fe -- that is the one described by Miss Power and Mr. Hill and the one to which my investigations commit me -- is far different from the one described by Bancroft and followed by historians subsequent to him. Whitney brings the Escalante group from Beaver river over the Escalante valley. Whitney, History of Utah, Vol. I, p. 290, and Bancroft History of Utah, p. 16, says: "On the 8th of October they are in latitude 38° 3' with Beaver River behind them. Passing on into what is now Escalante valley, they question the natives regarding a route to the sea", etc. Moreover, old residents of Escalante, a town founded 1876, have a tradition that Escalante visited the region and made his exit to the Colorado down Escalante River. One old gentleman who has lived in the town since its founding, thinks he remembers seeing the name Escalante on the rocks painted with blue paint. He further states that Mr. A. H. Thompson who was with the Power Survey Company through that country in 1876, told the people to name their town Escalante after the great Spanish explorer who came that way in 1776, and went down Escalante canon. A letter from Mr. Isaac Riddle, an Escalante resident who has been investigating this tradition for the writer, bears out these facts as stated. The inscribed or painted name of Escalante has, however, faded into a tradition; there is no one who can locate the bluff where it was supposed to have been written or inscribed.

Now the town of Escalante is more than one hundred miles east of the route actually followed as assumed in this routing. When the notion or tradition? Why did Bancroft take him over such a course? The journal descriptions from day to day and league by league are entirely out of harmony with the traditional route and fit admirably into that described above.

the Santa Fe from whence they started some five months before.

The Great Basin was now open to white men, and an initial movement inaugurated which should not end until the whole interior was carved into American states. Before the projected road through the Basin to California was opened the ownership of the region passed from Spain to Mexico. So far as known no other official attempt was made either by Spain or Mexico to materialize the project of Escalante. As usual the real pathfinders were fur traders or missionaries, the former in this case following the lead of the missionary. For nearly three quarters of a century after 1776 fur traders were penetrating this interior, first from the south and east center by the Spaniards, then from the north by the Americans and the British. Spurred on by such motives, practically every important stream was located and described, the best mountain passes were discovered, and the deserts were surveyed and crossed by men to whom disaster never meant defeat in their contest with the wilderness.

While the foregoing generalization is true in its essential aspects, and will find illustration in subsequent discussions, it appears that during the next quarter of a century after 1776, Spanish activities in the Basin and among the Yutas really slackened rather than increased. International relations pivoted around the American Revolution and extending from it to practically all Europe involved Spain so seriously that her energies in this rather forbidding part of her domain, were dissipated. The Mississippi Valley and the Atlantic frontier demanded attention as well as California, which was now defended and extended by other means than finding a new route via Santa Fe and the Great Basin.

It may be surmised with considerable surety, however, that adventurous Spaniards, free trappers and traders, concerned more with their own affairs

than with world politics, continued to trade with the Yutas on both sides of the divide. But until the early nineteenth century, no accurate data revealing such traffic are available.⁶

In 1805 important inferential evidence is found in communications between Joaquin de Real Alencaster, then governor of New Mexico, and the commandant-general. Alencaster, in commenting on the virtues and remarkable exploits of one Manuel Nestas, a Genizaro, who had served some fifty years as a Yuta interpreter, refers to him as one who had reduced the Yutas to peace, and who had recovered horses stolen by the Comanches and retaken by the Yutas in a subsequent war between the two tribes. From the account given it appears he had gone to the vicinity of the Yutas Timpanogos which would be around the Utah Lake of today. Furthermore one might conclude there had been rather intimate connection between the Yutas and the Spaniards all along.

THE ARZE-GARCIA EXPEDITION

1813.

A recently discovered document in the Spanish archives of New Mexico furnishes definite data concerning a trading expedition to the heart of the Utah Basin in 1813.⁷ The company consisting of seven men, were under the direct command of Mauricio Arze and Lagos Garcia. They were gone

6. Mr. J. J. Hill of the Bancroft Library is making an independent study of the fur trade in the Southwest and disclosing rather extensive operations in this region. See Oregon, Historical Quarterly, vol. 24, no. 1, under the title "Ewing Young and the Fur Trade of the Far Southwest, 1822-1834."

7. J. J. Hill, op-cit., 461 ff. A photographic copy is in the Bancroft Library. The original document is listed without number in Twitchell "Spanish Archives of New Mexico."

some four months, leaving Abiquiu March 16, 1813 and returning on the 12th of July. When the governor of New Mexico heard of their return, he ordered them to report to Manuel Garcia the alcalde of the "Villa de Santa Cruz de la Canada."

Five of their number, under oath, gave testimony of the circumstances of their journey. The facts as they related them were in substance as follows. They had gone to Timpanogos (Utah) Lake and remained three days among the Yutas there. According to their story the Indians insisted on selling them slaves. When the Spaniards refused the Indians began killing their horses. After eight horses and a mule had been killed the chief succeeded in quieting them. But the Spaniards now hastened preparations to get away.

From this point they went south to the San Sebero (Sevier) River where they met a Yuta of the Sanpuchi (San Pete) nation, who guided five of the party - the other two remaining with the pack train - a journey of three days to the bearded Indians of whom Escalante wrote. The Santa Isabel River of Escalante thus becomes the San Sebero (Sevier) of the Arze-Garcia, expedition, the bearded Indians being the means of identification of the region.

In the affidavits no details of the route taken were given, from which it might be inferred that no great difficulty was encountered and that perhaps the way to the Timpanogos was well known. This thought, too, is reinforced by the statement that the Indian guide promised to take them to some Yutas, the bearded Indians, not known to them, the implication being that the Timpanogos Yutas were well known.

While Dominguez and Escalante found these Indians kind and gentle, they were now fierce and menacing. Fearing a massacre, the five Spaniards

stole away in the night, rejoined their two companions, and commenced their journey on the road to the Colorado. It is not pertinent to this discussion to follow the party further or to give details of experiences on the way home. Suffice it to say the western barrier is being crossed and the inland region explored. Motives, too, urging the Spaniards on, are also revealed, not only were they after peltries, but the custom of trading in slaves is manifest and was perpetuated until some years after the Mormons settled the valleys.

Continuously after 1813, the date of the Arze-Garcia expedition, trapping and trade were conducted in this Colorado Green River region, and, as we have now seen, in the interior as well. The passing of the country from Spanish to Mexican ownership in 1821, served to accentuate this trade. Yet it required another decade to extend the Spanish Trail "to California," its western limit was still the Utah Basin region around Utah and Sevier Lakes. But the transfer of authority from Spain to Mexico gave a great impetus to the Santa Fe trade and opened the way for the commerce of the prairies in which the Americans engaged with ever increasing profit and interest. The Santa Fe trail or road was opened and wagons taken over for the first time in 1822, William Becknell being the pioneer in this new enterprise. 1824 was a gala year for various business enterprises centering at Santa Fe. The agencies of transportation in this period were wagons and mules, hence a great demand for mules. The sources of supply were California, and the central base of exchange for east and west was Santa Fe.

It was, then, this new-born commerce of the prairies that compelled once again attention to the matter of a direct route to California, where mules of superior quality could be purchased in sufficient numbers to supply the demand of the Missouri traders. Accordingly in 1829 two expeditions

succeeded in crossing the divide and the Great Basin and reaching California, but not by the so-called Spanish Trail which was, however, opened the following year, 1830-31, but not by the Spanish. Of the two expeditions mentioned, the first was Mexican, but its route lay somewhat south of what became the so-called Spanish Trail. The second expedition led by Ewing Young of Tennessee, also traveled a more southern route. He, however, crossed⁸ over the Mojave region and the southern rim of the basin.

It seems now from available evidence, that Wm. Wolfskill, who organized a fur company the following year, 1830, was the first to discover and travel⁹ this famous route. Ewing Young, who has been generally accredited with being a member of the Wolfskill company, remained in California until 1831. Wolfskill entered the Basin in the region of the Sevier River, and then went southwest towards California. Difficulties were encountered in the irregular mountain country. Eventually the Cajon Pass was reached and crossed and the obstacles obstructing the path to Los Angeles disappeared. This constituted the extension of the Spanish trail from the Sevier Lake region to California.¹⁰ The "Old Spanish Trail" never really extended farther than the great Basin.

8. See J. J. Warner "Reminiscences of Early California" in Historical Society of California, Vol. XII, 1907-1908, pp. 184-190.

9. From the ms. (in Bancroft Lib.) containing Kit Carson's own account of the Ewing Young Co. 1829-1830, of which he was a member, we see that route taken was along the southern rim of the basin, and not along that came to be called the Old Spanish trail, which it will be seen was first traveled from the Sevier Lake region of the Great Basin on to California by the Wolfskill Company in which Young no doubt had an interest, but of which he was not an accompanying member. Compare Peters, Dewitt Clinton, The Life and Adventures of Kit Carson, N. U. 1859 pp. 37ff.

10. Mr. J. J. Hill, assistant in the Bancroft Library, in a study of the Fur Trade of the Southwest, has been able to identify six trails through the Basin to California.

The original purpose of the Wolfskill party seems to have been to trap beaver in the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers where beaver were reported to be plentiful, but it seems upon arrival that traffic in mules offered the greater profit. At any rate blankets brought from New Mexico to be traded to the Indians were exchanged for mules. There were of excellent form and breed, and attracted numerous buyers when brought into New Mexico. Warner says the size and quality of these mules created a genuine
11
sensation in New Mexico. No wonder, for mules were steam power in that age of traffic across the prairies. In fact this mule train traffic continued until displaced by the steam engine and the "Iron horse".

Nor was the Mexican expedition under Armijo without importance. Even though the credit for following first the historic route may not be his, he did enter the heart of the southern Basin with his party of sixty men, and by following south he soon reached the Virgin River region, and from thence crossed the Mojave desert to the San Bernardino Mountains and
12
San Gabriel Mission. The long-sought communications between Santa Fe and California were established, and it simply remained to find the better route later on.

While the southern portion of the Great Basin was thus being penetrated and explored, the northern area, too, was becoming familiar ground to the American and British fur traders. Indeed almost simultaneous with the Arze-Garcia expedition in 1813, a small group of Americans, detached from the Astorians, were wandering about in the northern valleys of the Basin. It seemed a race between the Northwesters and the Astorians as to

11. J. J. Warner, op.cit.

12. Antonio Armijo, Itineraire du Nord-Mexico a la Haute California par couru en 1829 et 1830 par soixante Mexicans. (Bulletin de la Societe de Geographie, Paris, 1835, ser. 2, III. 316-323)

which should enter this unknown region first. The Americans won a priority but the British followed a few years later, and seemed to have the advantage until 1824. This year so notable in the trade centering at Santa Fe, was marked by remarkable discoveries in the region north of Utah Lake. The intense competition between the Americans and the British in their thrust southward will be considered in chapters to follow.

CHAPTER II

THE NORTHERN RIM OF THE BASIN.

THE ASTORIANS AND THE SUBSEQUENT SNAKE RIVER EXPEDITIONS TO 1824.

.The first quarter of the nineteenth century was marked by ever increasing interest in the regions lying between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. Private gain and personal adventure were reenforced by international rivalry and imperialistic ambitions. While England, Russia, Spain, and America were engaged in lively competition for the trade of the Pacific and the eventual control, and, perhaps, ownership of California, private companies and free trappers were likewise engaged in the interior regions.

The lucrative business of fur hunting and slave traffic in the southern half of the Great Basin--a business that was later supplemented by commerce with California--was paralleled by rival explorations and courageous and competitive fur trading enterprises in the Columbia River basin. Some of these struggles furnish material for both romance and tragedy. Out of these rivalries grew many discoveries and explorations in the Great Basin, and perhaps it would not be too much to say that upon the victory of the rival companies in the field, depended the future ownership of this whole region west of the "Stony Mountains". At any rate history generally records that actual occupation puts at rest questions of discovery and technical disputes of ownership. When the pathfinder is followed by the settler, the victory of diplomacy is won. And so in this instance much depended upon the

1. Robert Glass Cleland. A History of California, The American Period, N.Y. 1922. See chapters I & II. Also Chap. VII, "California, Great Britain, and America". "Boston, California and Canton", for suggestive comment along this line.

persistence of the parties in the field and their eventual triumph.

It will be recalled that President Jefferson was interested in and curious concerning this great western region, even before the purchase of Louisiana. Perhaps, too, his natural scientific curiosity was reenforced² by patriotic motives and imperialistic designs. At any rate following immediately the transfer of Louisiana to the United States the Louis and Clarke expedition was fitted out. The results of this expedition were most significant and far reaching. The Columbia river region became the Mecca of the hopes of fur traders, and the object of bitter contest between the United States and England.

Two years after the return of Lewis and Clarke, the American Fur Co.,³ was chartered in New York with the renowned John Jacob Astor at its head. With well thought out plans and designs, Mr. Astor organized his company for active operations on the Columbia, and in the trade of the Pacific. The organization for this locality was called the Pacific Fur Company. The mouth of the Columbia was to be the center of operations, and the business was projected from here in truly international proportions. Trade with the Russian settlements to the north and with China were important features of the scheme. Communications with the Columbia post were to be kept up both

2. See Irving, Astoria, Vol. i, p. 48-49; cf Jefferson's works, Vol. IV, and passim. For a good reflex of Jefferson's views, see Albert Gallatin, Life of, by Henry Adams, Philadelphia, 1879, Vol. 1, passim.

3. The date usually given for the chartering of this company is 1809, but see Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p. 167. Articles of agreement between Mr. Astor and his associates were entered into June 23, 1810, under the firm name of "The Pacific Fur Company", Irving, Astoria, p. 54.

by land and sea. Once each year a ship load of supplies was to be sent around Cape Horn. After furnishing the post, the ship would cruise up to the Russian settlements where a profitable trade would follow. Then returning to the Columbia post the catch of furs would be loaded as cargo for China. After a profitable exchange for the rich goods of Canton the ship would return to
4
New York.

No less promising were the overland plans. With keen insight, Astor contemplated a line of forts on the Missouri and the Columbia connecting St. Louis and the mouth of the Columbia. This would provide a much shorter route than that from Montreal to the Columbia and would thus secure an advantage to the New company over that of the Northwest Company, of which more will be said later. Such in brief outline was the scheme of John Jacob Astor-- a design that was full of promise for the company and for the future of the
5
United States.

Now as to the execution of the plan. It will be the concern of this paper to deal with the overland expedition, and that only so far as it connects more directly with the subject in hand, that of the Great Basin. The full significance of the local details, however, can be understood only in the light of the larger setting. How far any single event shapes or modifies future history it is impossible to determine with accuracy. But within certain limits, and in the light of surrounding facts, one can speculate with a certain degree of consistency.

4. Irving gives a comprehensive description of this whole scheme. Washington Irving, Astoria, or An Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains, London, 1836.

5. Irving, loc cit; also see Herbert O. Lang, History of the Willamette Valley, Portland, Oregon, 1885.

The experiences and achievements of the overland Astorians constitute not only an important basis for the acquisition of the Oregon country by the United States, but furnish also the motive for early incursions into the inland basin. Various questions arise as to what might have been the results had not this Astor enterprise been undertaken. How would the situation have been changed had David Thompson for the Northwest Company arrived at the mouth of the Columbia and hoisted the British Flag before the Astorians arrived, instead of coming, as he did, a few months later and finding the American company already installed? Had this happened, certainly the post would not have been turned over to the United States after the war of 1812. Nor could those who favored and urged the occupation of Oregon in the early 20's have used this incident as evidence of the claims of the United States. Would the Great Basin have become later an enticing region to the trapper had not members of this Astoria group discovered that inland rivers were rich in beaver? Certain it is these discoveries were made, and later followed up by more extensive explorations leading eventually to permanent

6. In Canadian Magazine, Vol. 50, p. 345, occurs the following: "This brings us to the whole point involved in the American contention which deprived Great Britain of a vast territory to which the United States possessed no shadow of right. A year before the amalgamation of the rival companies, the Northwest coast for the first time engaged the attention of the American government, and what came to be known as the Oregon question had its birth. The States possessed no title to the country, but a strong party believed they had a right to found by occupation a legitimate title to a large portion of the territory in question. A bill was introduced in Congress for the occupation of the Columbia river region. It is curious to reflect that the restoration of Fort George (Astoria) by the British was one of the strong arguments used at that time."

settlements. Throughout the whole period rivalry of the different companies and opposing nations was keen and persistent.

While the charter for the American Fur Company was issued by the New York Legislature in 1808, the Pacific Fur Company, which was really the American Fur Company perfected in organization for this particular Columbia river, Pacific Coast trade, did not leave St. Louis for the coveted goal until March 21, 1811. Knowing the rivalry and opposition to be encountered, Mr. Astor had tried in the interim to create a merger with the Northwest Company. Failing to reach any basis of friendly cooperation, he determined to meet the situation by courageous competition. Prominent leaders of his company, however, were recruited from the Northwest Company. Among these were Alexander McKay, who had accompanied Sir Alexander Mackenzie in both his expeditions to the northwest coast, 1789-1793, Duncan McDougall, a brother of the McDougall who commanded Fort McLeod, the first fort built by the Northwest Company in New Caledonia, and Donald McKenzie of whom we shall have much more to say later on in this chapter. Others prominent in the company were Wilson Price Hunt, made the first resident agent, Ramsey Crooks, Robert McLellan, Joseph Miller, Robert Stuart, David Stuart and John Clarke. Later, as the company traveled up the Missouri, it was joined by John Hoback, Edward

Ernest Cawcroft, "Donald McKenzie: King of the Northwest" in Canadian Magazine, Vol. 50, p 345. Mr. Cawcroft takes this quotation from Beckles Willson, The Great Company, Vol. II, pp 231-233.

The paragraph is comprised of a series of separate extracts taken from their context and combined as if a continuous passage. However, the essential meaning is maintained.

Albert Gallatin, The Oregon Question, 1846, writings III; 491-536.

Robinson, and Jacob Reznor, previous members of the Missouri Fur Company. These three in connection with John Miller and a man by the name of Cass were the first to penetrate the Basin from the north.

The company at its maximum strength consisted of 130 horses and sixty-five persons. They left the Arikara villages on the Missouri about the first of August 1811, and, wishing to avoid the Blackfeet Indians, of whose savage ferocity they had heard much, turned their course southward to the 40th degree of latitude. From thence they directed their course northwest until they arrived at the forest established by Andrew Henry in 1810, at the headwaters of what has since been known as Henry's Fork of the Snake River.⁷

The company remained here ten days and recuperated. Believing, without sufficient evidence, that this stream would lead them to the Columbia, and assuming it to be navigable, Mr. Hunt made the serious mistake here of abandoning his horses and starting down the river in canoes. Five of their number, however, remained behind. These were Reznor, Hoback, Robinson and Cass, of whom mention had previously been made. To them was added one more, a stockholder in the company, Mr. Miller, who, despite the surprise and protests of his fellow shareholders, persisted in disassociating himself from the company, and as soon as opportunity offered, returning to the United States.

Of course these trappers were in the meantime to engage themselves in the catching of peltries, which, according to agreement, were to be delivered either at this post or at the mouth of the Columbia where the

7. Gabriel Franchere, Narrative of a voyage to the Northwest Coast of America in the years 1811-1812, 1813-1814. Translated and edited by J. V. Huntington, Redfield, N.Y. 1854. pp 145-147.

new post was to be established. Well equipped, then by the company, they were left to pursue their devious and dangerous ways. Two Snake Indians were to guide them to the best trapping grounds and then return to the forest to take in charge the horses that were, perforce, left behind.

Late in October the main party in fifteen newly constructed canoes started down the river. It was the beginning of the season of ice and snow and yet, says Irving, "the hearts of the travelers were light, and, as they glided down the little river, they flattered themselves with the hope of soon reaching the Columbia".⁸ Little did they realize the breakers ahead, or the perils they were to pass through before reaching their destination.

For several days they moved cheerily along, meeting some difficulties, to be sure, but bravely overcoming them. When rapids and narrows were reached, the canadian voyageurs cheerfully portaged around, singing and joking all the while. Thus the journey proceeded for nine days, the difficulties and perplexities continually increasing. At the end of this period, Oct. 28, they reached a point where the river was compressed into a narrow gorge some thirty feet wide. Here the waters went rolling and tumbling between banks of perpendicular ledges two hundred feet high. As the canoes approached these breakers, the one in which Ramsey Crooks was seated headed straight for a huge rock. He called to the steersman but without avail. The next moment the little canoe was split and overturned, The experienced voyager was drowned. The rest of the party, after thrilling experiences,

8. Irving, Astoria, Vol. II, pp 167-168.

were rescued, but the whole company was stopped and faced with the situation of finding other means of travel.

Further investigation proved that canoes on such a turbulent stream could no longer be thought of. In fact the most experienced voyageurs were thoroughly dismayed at the prospect. This wicked defile through which the waters raged was called Caldron Linn, by which name it has ever since been known. Chittenden suggests that the exact location of this defile is not known, but it was probably about half way between the American and the Shoshone Falls.

After due consideration the company, under the compelling circumstances with which they were surrounded, decided that their only recourse was to travel on foot the remaining distance to Astoria. Accordingly, such goods as were not absolutely necessary for the journey, were stored in nine caches, the company was divided into two parties who were to descend the river on opposite sides, and the long, dreary, winter journey was resumed Nov. 9, 1811. Irving, in his inimitable style has told the story of these overland wanderers, while the journals and works of Ross, Franchere and Cox furnish a basis for a wealth of detail. Then, too, Chittenden has personally

9. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p 198, Cf. Irving, op cit p 177.

10. Chittenden, loc. cit.

11. These works so often cited are the most important sources for this early period. Irving is largely indebted to these for his Astoria.

made a physical identification of the route clear from St. Louis to
12
the mouth of the Columbia.

It is not the purpose here to narrate circumstances in detail of the various detached groups who arrived at Astoria the following spring and summer. Suffice it to say that Mr. Hunt's party reached the fort Feb. 15, 1812, nearly one month after the arrival of McKenzie, McClellan, Reed and companions. Crooks and Day were picked up by David Stuart's party on their return trip from Okanagan, where they had established a post. May 11, 1812, they made their appearance at the fort. Thirteen men were still left in the wilderness, seven of whom reached Astoria nearly a year later, Jan. 15, 1813.

Here it is proper to give attention once again to the Kentucky trappers, Reznor, Hoback and Robinson, together with Cass and Mr. Miller who had joined them when they were detached at Fort Henry in the fall of 1811. It will be remembered they were to trap and deliver their peltries to the company either at Fort Henry or at the post at the mouth of the Columbia. What had they been doing all this time? An answer to this question requires attention to the returning Astorians.

The beginnings of Astoria were made by members of the crew of the ill-fated Tonquin in the early spring of 1811. It was the 12th of April that sixteen persons in a launch freighted with all things necessary for the establishment glided up the mouth of the river to the point chosen for the post.¹² All things considered

¹². Chittenden, loc cit 196-198.

¹³. Irving, Astoria, Vol. I, p 144.

the circumstances of the founding were suspicious; and, barring external misfortunes such as the destruction of the Tonquin, the difficulties of the overland groups, the attempted forestalling of the Astor plans by David Thompson for the "Nor'westers", the work of building the factory and post proceeded at an encouraging rate.

In accordance with the plans of Mr. Astor to send an annual ship laden with supplies for the company and merchandise for the Russian settlements, the ship Beaver arrived early in May. This gave new life and vigor to the affairs of Astoria; and, taken in connection with the overland reinforcements of numbers, gave an impetus to activities in various directions. To meet the rivalry of the Northwest Company and to extend the operations of the American Company, parties under McKenzie and Clarke were sent out to establish post above the forks of the Columbia at such points as were deemed most advantageous to the business. A third party was laden with supplies for the new post at Okanagan founded by David Stuart. In addition to these interior expeditions, a party was organized to carry dispatches to Astor in New York informing him of the state of affairs. The latter company was led by Robert Stuart. It is the wanderings of this group that possess most significance for Great Basin History.

This perilous and important mission across the continent was entrusted to a little group of five men, consisting of the following: Robert Stuart, the leader, Ben Jones, and John Day, the Kentuckians, and Andre Vallar, and Francis LeClerc, Canadians. These were joined by Mr. McClellan and Ramsey Crooks, thus augmenting the

number to seven. A few days later, however, John Day became violently insane and was sent back to Astoria. This left six to continue the journey.

The four companies left Astoria together June 29th, 1812, and traveled thus in conjunction until July 28th, when they reached Walla Walla, the point of necessary separation. Companionship and protection were afforded by thus combining their groups in one company, but now each party must pursue its separate objective.

The Walla Walla Indians had befriended Crooks and John Day in their dire extremity, and now welcomed the party in true Indian fashion by dancing around a bonfire before the camp. From these friendly people Mr. Stuart succeeded in buying twenty horses for the use of his men. The greater number of these were to be used as pack animals for the goods and baggage. After several days of preparations in making pack saddles, packs, etc., the little party started on its long and perilous journey.

Irving in his graphic way paints the travels of the party as they retrace the route that proved so baneful to Mr. Hunt the
14
previous winter. Nothing of great moment, however, occurred during the first twelve days of the journey, save the loss of a dog by thirst and exhaustion--an animal upon which apparently the men lavished considerable affection. On the 12th of August the weary travelers came upon the banks of the Snake river and bent their way up the southern side towards Caldron Linn. They had not gone far when a lone Snake Indian visited their camp and informed them that there was a white man living at the camp of one of the tribes a little higher up the river.

14. Op cit Vol. III, Chapter 2, p 16 ff.

of course conjectures were rife as to whom it could be. The conclusion was reached that it must be one of the men left by Mr. Hunt in the trying journey of the previous winter. The next morning they were early on their way eagerly looking for a lost comrade. Several days passed and further trace of the white men could not be obtained.

But coming one evening upon a camp of Shoshones near the Salmon river, their curiosity and interest were still further aroused by the report of these Indians that there were white men residing among them on the opposite side of the river. Again speculation was aroused. Could they be Mr. Miller and the hunters who had detached themselves at Fort Henry to trap in the mountain streams? Such was the conclusion of some of the company. Whoever they were they should be found and added to the little group. Accordingly, Mr. Stuart sent an Indian across the river to seek them out and bring them to camp where they planned to remain a few days and await developments.

And here the travelers enjoyed some of the characteristic companionship of parts of southern Idaho. All night long the place swarmed with myriads of mosquitoes, which made continuous javeline attacks, accompanied by martial music. In consequence, sleep was out of the question. Perhaps this is the section where men and horses now wear screens in haying time. To dampen their ardor still further, the Indian returned in the morning with no news of the white men.

While in this dejected mood and feeling themselves duped by the Indians, an Indian came galloping after them, who, on reaching the company, dismounted, threw his arms around the neck of Mr. Stuart's horse and began to kiss him. It developed later that the horse had

been stolen from him by the Walla Wallas. Members of the party now recognized him as one of the guides of Mr. Hunt's party the preceding Autumn, and from him they now drew a long and remarkable story. The company horses he and his fellow guide had been set to guard were all stolen, the caches had been plundered, and Mr. Miller and his comrades had been robbed of their horses, weapons, and all.

Various other matters of interest were given, which are not apropos of this discussion. One item, however, was of rather far reaching importance, and will engage further attention. It related to a shorter route across the mountains than the circuitous route Mr. Hunt had taken. It might be remarked in passing that the Indian was induced to accompany the group as a guide, but soon made away with the favorite horse he claimed as his own--another example of Indian perfidy.

For several weary days the little party traveled on, choosing the long route along the river banks instead of the short cut described by the Indian, and suffering all the while from heat, mosquitoes, and flies. The nights were even more miserable than the days, as the sting and sing of the mosquitoes made it almost impossible to sleep. On the 20th of August, a day most sultry and hot, some of the party left the line of march to refresh themselves at the river. There underneath the willows they descried a man fishing, and John Foback greeted them with exclamations of joy. Soon the three companions appeared on the scene. The anxiously looked for white men were found. One of their number, however, Mr. Cass, was missing. There are various conjectures concerning his fate.

15. Irving, (Astoria, Vol. III, p 32), refers to a story that was current to the effect that the disappearance of Cass was explained by the fact that the travelers were reduced to the last extremity. Cf Chittenden, op cit p 208.

These men had thrilling and doleful stories to tell. After detaching themselves from Mr. Hunt's party in the fall of 1811, they had moved southward some two hundred miles, apparently clear over the divide and into the Great Basin region. At least their account of their wanderings, and the description they gave of the country can lead to no other conclusion. They had discovered a river which discharged itself into the ocean south of the Columbia. In all probability what they thought to be the ocean was Great Salt Lake and the river was, as Irving¹⁶ concludes, Bear River.¹⁷ This version of the case is generally accepted. though not many history writers go as far as Chittenden who declares "It is highly probable that this stream was the present Bear River, Utah,¹⁸ and these men visited Great Salt Lake."

The latter part of the statement is indeed very improbable. Having passed over the watershed dividing the streams and affluents of the Columbia from the "Spanish Waters", they naturally concluded that these flowed into the Pacific. But had they gone to Great Salt Lake they would have had a different and much larger story to tell. In fact they could scarcely visit Salt Lake without knowing it was a lake and not an ocean. Be that as it may, we are quite safe in concluding that these were the first Americans and the first white men to cross over into the Basin from the north. In so doing they were, of course, crossing over the international boundary line into Spanish territory. This was in the fall and winter of 1811-1812, one year

16. Irving, *Op cit*, p 32.

17. Dale, *Ashley-Smith Explorations*, p 37. Cf Bell, James Christy, Jr., H. H. Bancroft, *History of the Northwest Coast*, Vol. II pp 185-

186. *Opening a Highway to the Pacific, 1838-1846*. Columbia University Studies, N.Y. 1921.

18. Chittenden, *op cit* p 207.

earlier than the Arze-Garcia expedition in the south.

Upon this stream which we now assume to be Bear River, they found beaver in abundance, and trapped with great success. They loaded their horses with rich packs of peltries and started eastward, no doubt with glowing hopes of future wealth. After traveling two hundred miles east, they came upon some Arapahoe Indians who robbed them of their treasure, stole several of their horses, and even stripped them of most of their clothing. They were indeed glad to escape with their lives. Fifty miles farther on they camped for the winter. Early in the spring they again started out to try their fortunes, but were followed by these same outlaw Indians, who this time left them but two horses and scant supplies. From now on gaunt hunger and lurking savages stalked them almost constantly. But it is not the purpose here to follow them in their precarious wanderings. Suffice it to say that when found they were on the verge of starvation, and in this abject state, willingly and rejoicingly joined Stuart's company homeward bound. Eight days later, however, it may be surprising to learn that, having recuperated, Rezner, Hoback, and Robinson concluded to try their fortunes once more in the wilderness, but were some time later all murdered by the savages. Such is the life and often the fate of the trappers and the trail makers.

Summing up, we find that these intrepid wayfarers had made some real discoveries and thus added to geographical knowledge. Moreover, their story of plentiful beaver in the Bear river region probably influenced later incursions into the valley of the Great Salt Lake; for who can tell the subtle forces, the apparently insignificant events that direct the course of history?

Mr. Miller remained with the Stuart party and undertook to guide them over the mountains by a shorter route. Further mention of this will be made in a subsequent chapter. The point to be noted here is that they were led into the Great Basin over ground familiar to Mr. Miller. Soon they reached the river upon which Miller and his erstwhile companions had trapped. Stuart, in honor of his guide, named it Miller. It was none other, however, than the present day Bear River. Thus a second entrance by Americans into this vast inland territory was made in this early period, and one of its most productive valleys was discovered.

All in all, Mr. Miller proved to be a rather poor guide. The little party of seven were reduced to dire circumstances before reaching the headwaters of the Platt. Indeed their sufferings almost led them to the "last extremity", but eventually the feat of crossing the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific and back was accomplished. Mr. Astor was delighted with the report of achievements to date and was reported to have said, "I have hit the nail on the head this time!"

However, all was not so rosy as painted. The prospects were blurred by a variety of difficulties, and the outcome was not by any means certain in any event. But just at this time there was added to the already powerful influence of the rival Northwest Company the force of English arms. This very year, 1812, war was declared between England and the United States. The sequel, so far as the Astor interests on

19. Louis Masson, Les Bourgeois of the Compagnie du Nord Ouest. 2 Vols. Quebec, 1889-1890. Masson comments on the fact that many of the members of the bourgeois were former members of the powerful Northwest Company, which regardless of war had advantages over the Astor Company. Vol. II, pp 111 ff.

the Columbia are concerned are well known. Wisely or unwisely, maliciously or with due regard to Mr. Astor's interests, McDougal who in the absence of Mr. Hunt was in authority at Astoria, sold out the Astor holdings to the Northwest Company. He was supported in this transaction by Donald McKenzie. Both these men, as previously related, were former "Nor'westers", and both had been on the most friendly terms with David Thompson and his associates when they visited the Columbia river post soon after it was established. McDougal, in particular, was said to have treated Mr. Thompson almost as a co-partner.²⁰ Was Mr. Astor himself pro-British in choosing British subjects for leaders of his company, and withal in seeking cooperation with the Northwest Company in the beginning? Did he as more recently conjectured, let²¹ his sympathies run with the English during and after the war? Or was he, on the other hand, a patriotic far-seeing statesman, interested not only in the success and profits of a great enterprise, but in the expansion of the United States to the Pacific Coast?²²

Leaving these questions as not within scope of this narrative, we are confronted with the fact that the British "Norwesters" are for the next eight years, predominant in the Columbia River region and over the rim into the northern basin -- this, too, despite the fact that Astoria was turned

20. Irving, Astoria, Vol. III, pp. 230-233. Cf Francher, Narrative, 203-204. Ross Cox gives a favorable view of the transaction and cast no blame upon McDougall. He himself expresses pleasure in joining the Northwest Comp. Ross Cox, Adventures on the Columbia River. 2 Vols. London 1831. Vol. II pp 207-208.

21. See Wisconsin Historical Society Collections. Vol. 20, 1911, passim. Cf, Clinton A. Snowden, History of Washington, 4 Vols, N.Y. 1909, Vol. 1, p. 335.

22. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, pp 166-167. Cf, Herbert O. Lang, History of the Willamette Valley. Portland, Oregon, 1885. See p 150, concerning Astor's ambitions. Also compare Irvings favorable views.

back to the United States after the war. For three decades the British held the field as against all rivals, and through her fur traders stretched forth a menacing arm over California of which the Great Basin was then a part.

SNAKE RIVER EXPEDITIONS 1818-1824

It is very interesting and suggestive to note that McDougal and McKenzie, Ross, and Cox, all became stockholders and active agents in the Northwest Company. McKenzie was the first of the four leaders of Snake River expeditions between 1818-1831. These led to widely extended and very important discoveries and explorations in what is now southern Oregon and Idaho, as well as over the watershed into the inland basin region. These early expeditions under McKenzie, McDonald, and Ross will now be considered.

Trapping in remote fields and discovery of new ones necessarily led to a change of procedure. To be successful it seemed necessary for detached groups to cut themselves loose from their base of supplies, and remain months, and even a year, away from the central depot or post. Such parties must be made up of men of peculiar ability, of intrepid daring, of unusual endurance and initiative, and must be for the most part self supporting. At stated intervals the catch of furs would be concealed at a given point, and later on there would be an assembling of the various groups at the place named, when the furs would be taken from the caches and

23. Irving gives a detailed description of a cache and how made. See Astoria, Vol. II, pp. 184 ff.

the return journey commenced. This was the beginning of the rendezvous method, perfected more particularly by the American trappers at a later time.

Now Donald McKenzie was particularly fitted for just such wilderness activities as this new scheme involved. He was a physical giant, weighing some 312 pounds; and, coupled with his great size were a corresponding strength and endurance. Inured to the hardships of the wilderness, familiar with all aspects of the fur trade business, acquainted with Indian ways and wiles, and withal, absolutely fearless, he was just the man to lead men into new and untried fields.

He was a member of the famous McKenzie clan of Inverness, Scotland, of which clan, Alexander McKenzie was the most distinguished character. But others such as James, once a governor at the Kings Posts in Quebec, Henry Secretary of the Northwest Company at Montreal, Roderick McKenzie, a prominent member of said company, were scarcely less renowned. In such a setting of Scotch McKenzies did Donald receive encouragement for his adventurous spirit.

It was in September 1818 that he set out upon the first Snake river expedition. A fort had just been established at Nez Perces (Walla Walla) and it was from this point that the business was conducted for several years. Alexander Ross was in charge until 1823, and the various expeditions found their primal base of supplies here. After leaving, however, they made "war support war" as it were. After their first supply was exhausted they were often compelled to live on their poor, worn-out horses, or on beaver and beaver skins, or on a chance buffalo to be found on some of the more arid plains. In some parts, however, game was plenti-

ful; and when not stripped bare by the savages these wilderness trappers²⁴ lived on the "fat of the land".

McKenzie had entered into a five-year contract with the Northwest Company in 1816, and for the next two years there had been great controversy raging at Fort George over the wisdom of the new policy just described, and the new ventures south into the Snake river region. McKenzie found little support in his determined plan of action; but having been, as it will be recalled, with the Astorians in this region, he was convinced that it would prove a profitable expansion of the fur trade business. Accordingly, in spite of all opposition he set out as indicated in September, 1818. The expedition was made up of a motley crew of all classes, fifty men in all. These were equipped with ninety-five horses, three hundred beaver traps and a variety of stock of merchandise with which to trade with and to pacify the Indians. In the whole company there was no friend or confidant of McKenzie. He himself must be the unifying force, the guiding spirit, the personification of adventurous leadership for the whole motley crew.

Among this medley were a number of Iroquois. These were not only untrustworthy, but some of them, at least, were actually traitorously treacherous. So at Sham-naugh (the present Boise) river, McKenzie left them to trap or traffic, or indulge in profligate relations with the surrounding Indians as they saw fit. "From this place," says McKenzie, "We advanced, suffering occasionally from alarms, for twenty-five days, and then found ourselves in a rich field of beaver, in the country lying between the great²⁵ south branch and the Spanish Waters."

24. Ross, Fur Hunters, Vol. I, 202-203.

25. Ross, op cit. p. 201.

The closing phrase, "Spanish Waters", is significant. It can scarcely mean less than the streams over the divide in the Great Basin region. This, as is well known, was then Spanish territory. Furthermore, the description of his return journey would indicate that he had been in this southern basin. After taking a circuitous route around the base of the Rocky Mountains, he comes back again to the head waters of the Snake River, and from thence over familiar ground to the Boise river, or what he calls the Sham-naugh river, where he had left his Iroquois contingent. These imported Indian auxiliaries proved, as he feared, utterly unreliable and unprofitable.

While it is quite probable that McKenzie in these few months of reconnoitering had reached the upper Bear river region, he had not followed it far south. What he saw, however, sharpened his curiosity for further exploits. Accordingly in the summer of 1819, after receiving some en-
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forcements sent by Ross under Kittson, he started south again on a trip of real discovery.

Many thrilling experiences might be related of this expedition. It was the intent of McKenzie, if the situation proved favorable and the Indians peaceable, to extend his explorations farther south. While the Indians were far from peaceable, he succeeded in reaching the present Bear Lake. In a letter to Ross dated Black Bears Lake, Sept. 10, 1819, he has this to say: "We have passed a very anxious and troublesome summer, war parties frequent, in danger often, but still we do not despair. Time and perseverance will do much. You will make no arrangements for forwarding

26. Ross, op cit. p. 207.

our supplies, we have had enough of that already. I will accompany the
Spring returns and try to be at Fort Nez Perce's by the 20th of next June." 27

The heading of this letter is the important thing for consideration here. It shows that the little company were well into the Great Basin and farther south than any white man had hitherto penetrated from the north. But it seems he was still anxious to go on further, for disposing of his trappers to the best advantage possible in this vicinity, he took with him three men and an Indian chief and set out still farther south, but had not gone far when he came upon the main body of the Snake nation headed by two
28 great chiefs. One great object of McKenzie's extended tours to the south was to effect, if possible some sort of peace between the Nez Perce's and Snakes and thus secure more profitable trade relations. This object he now partially attained. After due deliberations, peace was declared and a very profitable trade sprung up. Ross describes this brisk fur trade and relates that sometimes four or five large beaver skins were offered by the Can-cit-tees and War-are-ree-kas' for a knife or an awl.

For five months the McKenzie men remained in this region of country trapping and trading with very profitable results. In the early spring they moved some little distance and found some streams especially rich in Beaver. While here they were visited by several bands of Snakes led by their chiefs. As an example of the fruitfulness of the streams, Ross relates that on the day of the arrival of these Indians, the hunters brought in two hundred and forty beavers at the same time.

27. Dale, Ashley-Smith Explorations p. 48 f. Copy of original in Ross, Fur Hunters, Vol. I.

28. Ross, op cit. p. 249.
Ibid 264.

As the season was well advanced they decided to start their homeward journey. The accumulated peltries were sufficient to lead one hundred and fifty-four horses. Thus heavily laden the whole company began its march, traveling for twenty-two days "over hills, dales, rocks and rivers," until they reached the long wished for Blue Mountains again. The Blue Mountains swing around in sort of semi-circular manner from Mt. Hood to the small affluents of the upper Snake near Fort Hall. They thus constitute a watershed between the Snake-Columbia drainage basin and the Spanish waters of the

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Great Basin.

After resting a few days in these mountains they pushed on arriving at Nez Perce's June 22, 1820. Here they were received amidst great rejoicing. The Snake river expeditions proved extremely profitable and McKenzie had justified the wisdom of his policy. Those who opposed him, now praised him. In fact, the company business had been nearly doubled, or, in other words, the Snake river expeditions increased the annual returns of furs nearly one hundred per cent.

In view of such flattering results it is not much wonder that within two weeks, McKenzie was off on another expedition of similar nature. This year, however, so far as can be gleaned from the accounts given, no new discoveries were made. This is also true of the expedition made by

29. I make this brief description of the Blue Mountains in conformity to the Map in Ross, Fur Hunter, Vol. I.

On Ross' map the western spur of these mountains running north into Oregon are called the western range and the Blue mountains proper are designated at the head waters of the Malheur and Owyhee rivers. The Blue Mountains of Oregon visible from Walla Walla looking south and east, are the mountains generally intended when mentioned by the early travelers. But see Irving, Astoria, Vol. III, pp. 19-20. Franchere, Narrative, in Thwaites, Early Western Travels, Vol. VI, p 338; extracts from Wilkes reports of 1845, in Thwaites op cit. Vol. XXIX, p. 72. For various other references see Thwaites, op cit Vol. XXVII, p 84, Blue Mountains. These mountains are of vital importance in determining the push into the basin from the north as they with their various links, constitute a watershed between the Oregon country and the "Spanish Waters" - waters of the inland basin.

Finan McDonald, McKenzie's successor in 1823. The regions that had proved so fertile for trapping were again visited, but whether they went again as far south as Bear Lake is perhaps questionable. It is evident, however, from later references, that this region was well known to Snake River men.

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In 1824 a Snake river expedition was led from Flat-head House by Ross himself who says in regard to it, "We had, however, reached a point where it became necessary for us to decide on the course we intended to pursue the rest of the season. I, therefore, called all the people together, and described the country to them and as it did not appear to me that one side was preferable to the other I left it to them to make the choice.

I told them that the country to our left, or southwest would lead us along the foot of the Rocky mountains to Henry's Fork and crossing there Lewis's river or the main south branch, we might proceed by the Blackfoot river to the Buffalo Snakes, the Sherry-dikas, and Bears Lake where the country was already known." 31 The other route described was unknown, but the spirit of adventure, and the hope of finding still better fields where the beaver had not been depleted by several years of trapping, led the company into the untried regions.

This expedition led by Ross in 1824 was important and significant for several reasons, but will be considered only briefly here as indicative of another push south into the Great Basin. As already pointed out,

30. Flat head House was near the present Eddy, Montana, a railroad station on the Northern Pacific Ry.. See journal of Alex. Ross, in Oregon Historical Society, Quarterly, Vol. 14, 1913, p 368, foot note.

This expedition therefore crossed over the Rocky Mountains from the east into the Idaho country. op cit pp. 365 ff.

31. Dale, Ashley-Smith Explorations, pp. 44-45. Cf. Ross's own account, Ross, Fur Hunters, Vol. II, pp 63 ff.

the main company chose the unknown fields to exploit. An Indian guide had told them marvelous stories of beaver to be trapped in this new region, but these proved entirely false. Very little success attended their efforts so far as peltries were concerned, but geographically their exploits were of considerable significance. They explored and described a good portion of central Idaho, now Custer County, and thus may be credited with a year of real discovery. Furthermore, and what is more to our purpose here, a detached group of Iroquois meandered far south and again Bear river yielded up rich returns in beaver. At least there is strong justification for such a conclusion.

At any rate Pierre, who led this detached band of Iroquois, after leaving the main company June 16, traveled in a southerly direction, crossed over the main river in the interior, where they trapped with great success for two months, catching over nine hundred beaver. ³² The interior was in all probability the Great Basin and the rich beaver streams the Bear River and its branches.

As a sequel to this story, Pierre related how they had been robbed of practically all their furs by a war band of Indians, who took, in addition, five of their guns and nearly all their clothing.

In this bedraggled condition they were found by Jedediah S. Smith and his associates of the Ashley-Henry Fur Company. This phase of the matter will be considered in a different connection in another chapter. Such is the essence of the story as told by Pierre when he joined the ³³ main expedition at the appointed rendezvous, the Trois Tetons, in October

32. Ross, Fur Hunters, Vol. II, pp 124, 128 ff. Cf, Oregon Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. XIV, p 382; Dale op cit, pp 96-97.

33. Here Mr. Ross misnames the three buttes in the desert southeast of Lost River by calling them the "Trois Tetons". See Oregon Historical Quarterly, page 382, footnote by the editor of the Ross journals, Elliot Coues.

1824. So it becomes evident that by this date, 1824, the Great Basin is becoming more and more a known region, and in some respects an attractive one.

The foregoing facts show that not only is the Oregon country becoming a battle-ground for supremacy on the part of the English and Americans, but that from this region as a base, wedges are being driven into the interior basin, territory then belonging to Spain and Mexico. The importance of these initial drives over the border line cannot be accurately measured, but it is certain they are significant of future developments.

In the struggle for colonial and trade advantages in this trans-Rocky mountain northwest, fortune seemed to favor the English up to 1824, and, indeed, their influence was in the ascendant so far as trapping and occupation are concerned until the early 40's. This is true of Oregon though not of the Great Basin.

It is interesting to note, however, the competition of the two nations through the initiative of adventurous free trappers or trading companies, was marked by alternate discoveries and post establishments, which tended to preserve a fair balancing of claims until actual settlement should force the hands of diplomacy to more definite conclusions. Thus Robert Gray, agent for a New England Commercial Company in 1792, sailed into the mouth of the Oregon river which he named after his vessel, Columbia. One year later, 1793, Vancouver and McKenzie matched this by their explorations. In 1790, the Nootka sound controversy was settled in favor of Great Britain. The Lewis and Clarke expedition of 1805-1806

furnished a basis for a more official claim to the Columbia river basin. Then in 1810, Andrew Henry discovered the head waters of the Snake and established Fort Henry. The following year, 1811, the Astoria post was established near the mouth of the Columbia. But David Thompson for the Northwest Company was soon on the ground in vigorous competition. In 1813 Astoria was sold to the British - Canadian Company, and although, under the terms of the treaty of Ghent this was finally turned back to the U. S. (not formally surrendered until 1818) the "Nor'westers" had the field pretty much to themselves until 1821, when it was absorbed by the great Hudson Bay Company. But in the meantime the little group of Americans detached from the overland Astorians at Fort Henry in the fall of 1811, had pushed over the divide into the Great Basin, and the returning Astorians who picked them up, also explored or passed over some of the same region in the Bear river country thus establishing American primacy in this inland empire, then Spanish. But Donald McKenzie for the "Nor'westers" matched these discoveries by still more extended and profitable exploits in the Bear river valley, 1819-1820. Finally in 1824, three years after the Northwest Company had been subsumed by the Hudson Bay Company, a group of Iroquois detached from Alexander Ross' Snake river expedition of that year, had again crossed over the Spanish border and penetrated the interior.

Without taking into account other factors, it would appear at this stage that the outlook for the British was far more promising than that of the Americans. In fact, despite the convention of 1818 providing for joint occupancy of the Oregon country, no American trappers had taken

advantage of the provisions. But there were developments now destined to reverse the relative position of the two nations and to bring about far-reaching changes. These will be considered in the chapters to follow.

34. L. J. Burpee, under the title, "A Forgotten Adventure of the Fur Trade in Queens Quarterly, Vol. XXVI, 1818-1819, has this interesting comment to make upon McKenzie's first Snake river expedition. In a letter from Alexander McKenzie, dated January 1819, he writes: "By a letter of Angus Bethunes he says: 'I heard of Donald's situation on the Columbia; it is one of considerable personal risk, but advantageous had he been able to reach the proper hunting grounds. It is now believed there is plenty of beaver in that country, and it will be very hard if it is wrested from us through the ignorance of the negotiators'."

Where Burpee obtains this letter he does not say. The latter part of the reference is no doubt to the Convention of 1818 between England and the United States and shows the anxiety of Alexander McKenzie with reference to the acquisition of this region.

CHAPTER III

THE ASHLEY-HENRY FUR TRADING ENTERPRISE

and

THE DISCOVERY OF THE SOUTH PASS

In the preceding chapter it was shown that as the first quarter of the nineteenth century drew to a close, the British were the dominant power in the Northwest. Not only did the trappers of the powerful Hudson Bay company control the fur trade of the Columbia river region, but they were thrusting far south in the interior of the mystic California. Without formidable opposition or competition, they seemed destined to extend their power and influence over an indefinite stretch of territory. But just at this time American enterprise and adventure took the field with results that were far reaching and potent in changing the whole trend of western development. The new born trade in the Southwest from the Missouri river to Santa Fe and a little later through the Great Basin to California by way of the old Spanish Trail, was paralleled by the opening up of a central roadway over the divide to the Pacific. Almost simultaneously these two movements developed. While the so called "commerce of the prairies" in the south was reaching a climax of interest and profit to Missouri merchants, and while freight wagons were jolting slowly along over the intervening valleys, plains, and hills to Santa Fe, enterprising fur traders were pushing over the Rocky mountains and discovering more accessible ways of reaching the interior and the coast. The time was ripening for another wave of westward migration, and as usual the fur traders were to pioneer the way and mark out paths. The British were not to be left in undisturbed possession of their monopolized trapping grounds. Nor was their continued movement southward to

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go unchecked or unopposed. By the discovery of a new passageway over the mountains, they were to meet competition where the growing balance would go heavily against them.

To initiate this new movement and meet the difficulties that would inevitably beset their pathway, hardy, persistent adventurers were needed. The times demanded new measures and new men, and the occasion, the opportunity produced both. A galaxy of names that should be, but unfortunately are not, familiar to every school boy now appear. Among these are such characters as William Henry Ashley, Andrew Henry, Thomas Fitzpatrick, James Bridger, Etienne Provot, Jedediah S. Smith, Wm. L. and Milton Sublett, and many others whose names might be mentioned.

The important contributions made by such hardy adventurers to the geography and development of the west have been largely overlooked by writers and teachers of history. In fact it remained for Hiram M. Chittenden, captain corps of U. S. Engineers in 1902, to bring into one historical synthesis the various matter pertaining to the Fur Traders in the regions west of the Mississippi river. Even yet justice has not by any means been done them. Their achievements are subordinated to those of official explorers who followed in their wake, and wrote more scientific descriptions of the country traversed. Backed by the government and fully equipped with supplies, instruments and agencies for defense, etc., these more honored explorers, nevertheless, had to depend upon information of the country already given

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1. Thos. H. Benton has interesting comment to make on the situation about this time, 1820-1821. He explains that it was through the influence of Ramsey Crooks and Russel Farnham, who, it will be recalled, were members of the Astoria party, that Floyd of Virginia introduced his bill in 1820 providing for the occupation of Oregon. These two veteran fur traders warned, "A vigorous effort of policy and perhaps of arms might be necessary to break her (Great Britain's) hold." Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years in the United States Senate, 2 Vols N. Y. 1854-1856. Vol. I, p. 15.
 2. Hiram M. Chittenden. The American Fur Trade in the Far West. 3 Vols.

by the fur traders who went before and who, furthermore, furnished the guides and scouts for the government expeditions.

While these latter should find their place in history, and while trained surveyors who gave accurate and scientific knowledge concerning our public domain should not be overlooked, it seems highly important to keep in memory and preserve in history the names of the free lances, the hardy adventurers, the courageous mountaineers, who blazed the trails and paved the way. They are all too rapidly passing from the living memory of man, and should, therefore, be "writ high" in the archives of the present. It seems, however, that current histories still ignore them in behalf of less worthy characters. In fact their names scarcely appear³ along the side of Long, Pike, and the historically made man, Bonneville. The recent history of Professor Channing, (Vol. V of his U. S. History) gives two pages to Captain Bonneville, and no space at all to Jedediah S. Smith who did infinitely more in the exploration of the west than did Bonneville. Bonneville was acting under official sanction of the army, and for this reason and others, has been given undue prominence in the history of the west.

Not, however, to take from Bonneville his fame or place in history,

New York, 1920. (It might appropriately be remarked here that Ven Chittenden has practically ignored the Fur Trade in the Far Southwest.

3. Of course it is well known that Captain Bonneville led a private expedition into the west, the prime purpose being to enhance his fortunes, but his report to President Jackson, 1836, and his reinstatement in the army gave to him a sort of semi-official prominence in history. Chittenden, (American Fur Trade, p. 430) has this to say of the incident: "Bonneville's maps on the other hand had the name and the fame of the famous Washington Irving to advertise them to the world. Bonneville refers in no way to his debt to Gallatin, or to Ashley and Smith, although it is evident that several important features were taken directly from these authorities. It was these maps compiled in large part from data derived from Gallatin, Ashley and Smith, that won for Bonneville his reinstatement in the army. 'By the Eternal, Sir!' President Jackson is said to have exclaimed when Bonneville showed him his map, 'I'll see that you are reinstated in your command. For this valuable service to the War Department and your country you deserve high promotion!' Thus did his public reputation receive an official stamp."

is he singled out in this instance, but to emphasize the importance of doing justice to the neglected. His case is typical. Our school boys and girls have heard of him and of Fremont, and of the heroes of pioneering west of the Alleghanies. Names such as Daniel Boone, John Sevier, George Rogers Clark, in the Ohio Valley, are perhaps familiar to them. They may, too, know something of the myth of Whitman saving Oregon, but of Ashley and Smith and Bridger, or Fitzpatrick, Provot, Campbell, David E. Jackson, the Sub-⁴lettes, etc., they have heard little or nothing. These names should become household words in the homes of the Rockies and the inland Basin. It is now the purpose of this discussion to show how these men with others, paved the way into the Great Basin and contiguous regions.

To William Henry Ashley belongs the credit of organizing a company and inaugurating a fur trading policy that, in its various ramifications and changes during the decade following, resulted in important and far-reaching discoveries and explorations, the significance of which are only now beginning to be more fully appreciated. To initiate the business he advertised in the Missouri Republican of St. Louis, March 20, 1822, for one hundred young men to ascend the Missouri river to its source, "there to be employed for one, two, or three years." Direction was given to apply to either Major Andrew Henry or himself. The ready response to this advertisement testifies strongly to the romantic and adventurous spirit of the age. The magic art of treasure hunting was by no means dead. The requisite number of eager young men was readily secured and among them were a number of notable characters in the subsequent history of the fur trade in the Far West. While it is

4. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, Chap. IV, p. 247 ff. A brief biographical sketch of these men is given in this chapter.

difficult to call the roll of this first expedition, it is known that the names of Thomas Fitzpatrick, James Bridger, and Etienne Provot appeared on list. Andrew Henry and Ashley both accompanied the party as far as the mouth of the Yellowstone river, when Ashley returned to St. Louis and Henry was left in full command.

The company left St. Louis some time in April in two keel boats laden well with supplies and fur trapping and trading equipment. One of the boats was sunk about twenty miles below Fort Osage. This was an initial loss of some ten thousand dollars --- a rather discouraging circumstance with which to launch an enterprise. However, the company pushed bravely on without further serious accident until after passing the Mandan villages. It was the intention to press on from this point to the falls of the Missouri and establish a fort before winter. On the way, however, and before reaching the Yellowstone, a band of Assiniboines attacked the party, stealing fifty head of horses.

It was now decided to abandon the plan of moving on to the falls of the Missouri. Accordingly a post was established at the mouth of the Yellowstone on the tongue of land between that river and the Missouri. Ashley remained until the fort was built and the company permanently settled for the winter. Leaving Henry in charge of the enterprise he then returned to St.

5. The following from Files Register fixes a definite date: "A company of 120 adventurers are stated to have left St. Charles, Missouri, on the 10th of April, for the Rocky Mountains." Reference is also made in this article to the character of the men and the purpose of the enterprise. Among other things it states "it is their business to pass over to the Columbia and from thence to the ocean." Files Register, Vol. XII, under date of June 8th, 1822. Cf Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p 63. The whole extract seems to be from N. Y. Com. Adv. which is appended here as given.

6. A brief account of this incident will be found in a report to a Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, 1822; American State Papers, Vol. VI Indian Affairs, Vol. II, p 455.

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Louis.

During the winter Henry and his men trapped the streams in that region and Henry secured some more horses. Early in the spring Henry led an expedition into the Blackfoot country. It is not the purpose of this narrative to discuss at any length the doings of Henry and his men in this dangerous region, nor are there many details available. Suffice it to say that the Blackfeet Indians proved true to form and accordingly drove Henry out of the country. Killing four of his men in the neighborhood of the Great Falls. Some time in the early summer he returned to the post at the mouth of the Yellowstone.

In the meantime Ashley was planning reinforcements and a widening of the company's activities. At St. Louis he again advertised for one hundred young men, organized his second expedition and left St. Louis on the 10th of March, 1823, in two keelboats named respectively "The Rocky Mountains" and the "Yellowstone Packet". He led this expedition himself and proceeded up the river without any untoward incident until the 20th of May when he reached the vicinity of the Aricara villages. The Aricara Indians had already made themselves notorious in their relation with the whites. Their treachery was a constant menace to all companies coming within the range of their villages, or seeking trade relations with them. At this particular time they were harboring revenge for the killing of two of their number in an encounter with the Missouri Fur Company, who refused to surrender two or three Indians of the Sioux tribe against whom the Aricaras were seeking revenge. As a result they swore vengeance against the whites and found now their opportunity.

7. For a brief and pointed characterization of these Indians, see Chittenden (American Fur Trade, Vol. I, p 264); also *ibid* Vol. II, Chap. II, 301 ff.

8. See report of Joshua Pilcher, *op. cit.* pp 153-157.

Ashley knew something of the attitude of the Indians and of the circumstance just related, but being desirous to procure horses to retrieve losses sustained by Henry at the hands of the Assinboines, and moreover, meeting with friendly advances from the Indians themselves, he entered into a bargain with them for the horses needed. The business was transacted with cordiality on both sides and by afternoon of June 1, the bargain was closed and preparations for moving on the next morning, June 2, were completed. Ashley returned to the boats in the river, leaving thirty-five or forty men with the horses on the adjoining shore. Thus closed with apparent satisfaction and success the happy arrangements of the day. Little did the men know the tragedy that awaited them ere the morning sun arose June 2.

Perhaps all were not so tranquil however, as appearances would indicate. Ashley himself had been warned by Edward Rose, as also by one of the Aricara chiefs, the so-called craven "Little Soldier" to be on his guard. But suspicious of Rose and lulled into fancied security by the pretensions of the Indians themselves, he seems to have thrown caution to the winds and gone to bed with full assurances of a happy resumption of his journey the following morning.

The party on the shore, being under the shadow of the Aricara stockade may not have felt quite so easy, but all were brave men and held no "purley with unmanly fears." As the night wore on clouds gathered in inky blackness as if to foreshadow the coming gloom. The men, no doubt, told frontier

C. Joshua Pilcher report, op. cit., loc cit. To a direct question of the Senate Committee to Pilcher, asking if he thought the Hudson Bay Company excited the Indian attack, he replied, "no"..

10

yarns, and passed campfire jests to vary the monotony, while the darkness overhead was relieved ever and anon by the lightning flash and the rumbling thunder. To add to the discomfiture, rain began to pour down and drench the tired watchers.

About half past 3 O'clock Ashley was awakened and told that one of his men had been killed by the Aricaras and that a general attack was imminent. From then until daylight preparation for the onslaught was being made.

As soon as light would permit, the treacherous natives from their sheltered picketing line began firing both on the men in the boats and those on shore, concentrating particularly on the shore party. The battle was short and terrific. The men fought bravely but at a great disadvantage. From the first their position was hopeless. Ashley tried to get his men in the keel boats to go to the assistance, but they refused to obey orders. Two small skiffs were finally sent over but the beach men refused to run. Only seven men, four of them wounded, availed themselves of the opportunity of the boats. The others with the energy of desperation fought bravely on.

Ashley was still unable to get the keel boats moved to the shore. Effort was made to get the large skiff back to the rescue of the remaining men, but the man handling it was shot down and the boat got adrift. Soon now the tragedy was finished. Within fifteen minutes after the battle commenced the horses were nearly all killed, and the remnant of the shore men were in such desperate straits that further resistance was out of the question. Of the forty who were in the fight, twelve were killed outright on the spot and

10. Meierdt, The Splendid Wayfaring, paints a graphic picture of this night and gives a most vivid description of the battle that ensued. Meierdt, Chap. IV, pp 46 ff.

more died shortly afterwards, and nine more were seriously wounded. The wounded and those who had escaped injury swam to the boats which immediately moved down stream to a place of safety, probably at the head of Ashley Island. 12

This tragic incident occasioned the famous Leavenworth campaign against the Aricaras in which Joshua Pilcher and sixty of his men cooperated. Colonel Leavenworth has been severely criticised for his part in this affair. 13
13
opinions differ as to the policy followed and the value of the results.

These two initial expeditions mark the beginning and furnish the background of important discoveries and explorations during the next decade. Ashley himself soon retired (1826) with an ample fortune but his associates and successors continued until 1834. From the personnel of these expeditions, too, emerged some of the most renowned frontiersmen and fur traders in the history of western development. Three of the most distinguished, James Bridger, Etienne Provot, and Thomas Fitzpatrick have been previously pointed out as conspicuous characters in the first expedition under command of Andrew Henry. Now a second trio appear in the second expedition under direct command of Ashley. These are Jedediah S. Smith, Wm. L. Sublette, and David E. Jackson, all three prominent in the tragic battle with the Aricaras on the beach. Each of these and others only second in importance will figure prominently in events to follow.

After the battle briefly described in the foregoing, was over, Ashley was particularly anxious to communicate with Henry on the Yellowstone and secure his aid. This, of course, was before the arrival of the

11. See casualty list given in a letter of Ashley's dated June 4, 1823. United States Executive Documents, 18th Congress, 1st session, Vol. I, No. 1. Cf Edwards Great West, p 33. Also Chittenden, American Fur Trade, pp 265-268.
12. Dale, Ashley-Smith Explorations, p 75 and footnote.
13. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p 601. For a discussion of this whole matter see "South Dakota Historical Collections", Vol. I. pp 181-256.

Leavenworth divisions. But the distance to the mouth of the Yellowstone by the most direct route was more than two hundred miles, and in view of the present mood of the Indians the trip would indeed be a most hazardous one. Ashley presented the situation to his men and asked for volunteers. The men were hesitant. The recent tragedy did not lend much zest to such an undertaking.

But presently to the surprise of all, young Jedediah S. Smith stepped forward and offered his services. He had distinguished himself signally in the fight on the shore, maintaining through it all perfect coolness and composure. Indeed, he had at first tried to unhobble the horses and force them into the river, that they might swim ashore on the other side of the stream and thus be saved. But the onslaught was so fierce that this idea had to be quickly abandoned, and the horses were then as far as possible, made use of as a barrier. Smith was among the last to jump into the river and swim to the boats. Now he offers to go alone on this perilous journey to Henry.

Ashley, greatly admiring the young man's courage, was nevertheless loathe to start him out alone. So one, Babbista, a French-Canadian, of experience was induced to go with him. As the evening shades drew in on the company and darkness shut the vision from without, the two men well armed and equipped with the two best horses that could be obtained, started out on their perilous mission.

Their journey was one continuous romance of adventure. On one or two occasions they barely escaped death at the hand of savages. Within some twenty days, however, they were back at Ashley's camp at the mouth of the Cheyenne river. On their return they were accompanied by Henry and the

14. Dale, Ashley-Smith Explorations, p 77, footnote.

major part of his forces.

It was now the middle of August and the summer sun was rapidly shifting toward the north. The fall hunt would soon be on with all of its challenge to courage and adventure. After due deliberation it was decided that Ashley should return to St. Louis and that Henry with his distinguished group of trapper explorers should push into the upper country and begin as soon as possible to trap the fruitful streams.

Back up the waters of the Grand and overland to the Yellowstone fort marched Henry and his men. There they intended to winter. Fate, however, seemed to follow Henry. Misfortune after misfortune overtook him. Only a short distance from the Mandan villages he was attacked by¹⁵ the Aricaras, losing two of his men. Shortly afterward, Hugh Glass was nearly torn to pieces by a grizzly bear.

This episode furnished the nucleus for one of the most tragic¹⁶ experiences in the annals of the west. Being left for dead by his two companions who were left to take care of him; he, by what almost seemed a pure act of will, resurrected himself to new life and purpose; and, wounded as he was, almost to death, set out on foot, or on hands and knees---he¹⁷ literally crawled a good portion of the distance --- with resolute determination to find Henry and his men and take revenge on his recreant watchers. After a crawl, the recital of which sounds almost like an Arabian Nights tale vitalized with the realism of flesh and blood, he, ghost like appeared at Henry's camp at the mouth of the Big Horn. This thirst for revenge, however, was not gratified. The elder of the two

15. Edwards, The Great West, p 336.

16. J.F. Neihardt, The Splendid Wayfaring, Chap. II. The Ghost. The main source of this narrative seems to be Cook, Scenes and Adventures in the U.S. Army, p 137-138. Philadelphia, 1857.

17. J. C. Neihardt, The Song of Hugh Glass. A dramatic recital in verse of this famous crawl.

watchers was not at camp, and the younger one, probably James Bridger, was
18
forgiven.

Here at the new post at the mouth of the Big Horn, the two companies now united under Henry, settled down for their fall and winter camp. The original number of the two companies was two hundred, but the dangers that have been encountered and the fatalities that have occurred have, by a process of elimination, reduced them to one hundred or thereabout. The law of the "survival of the fittest" no doubt, operated in the sifting process as among this group were some of the most daring and enduring frontiersmen in the whole list of distinguished American explorers. The massacre at the Aricara village, the continued threat from hostile Indians, the challenge of the great unknown wilderness beyond the Rocky mountains, the lure of treasure ever on the border of danger, -- all these things appealed to men in whom love of adventure was an impelling force, and the desire for courageous achievement a driving power. Of such metal were Smith, and Jackson, and Jackson, and Fitzpatrick, and Sublette, and Provet, and Bridger, and Hugh Glass, and others of this historic group. They knew not fear; they balked not at the multiplication of obstacles; they determined to channel their own course regardless of native elements or savage foes. Years of toil and danger, of sleepless vigils, of weary marches without shelter or assurance of food, were before them, but they had put their "hand to the plow" and would not turn back. They had cut themselves off

18. Dale, The Ashley-Smith Explorations, pp 36 ff. Cf. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, Chap. VIII. This is a carefully written and a critical account from all available sources. The earliest detailed account seems to be in Rufus B. Sage, Rocky Mountain Life, or Startling Scenes and Perilous Adventures in the Far West. pp 159 ff.

from civilization to try their fortunes in the twilight zones of the magic west lands, and with resolute purpose they carried on. Little did they know, perhaps, that soon their camp-fires in the great triangular basin, wedged in between the route taken by Lewis and Clarke and the northern boundary of New Mexico and Arizona, would light the way to settlement and to that civilization they had left behind. They were to build better than they knew; for within another quarter of a century they were to be pioneer explorers to that mysterious wilderness out of which were to be carved prosperous American States.

The present hour, however, was to them of immediate concern. The fall hunt was on and all were eager to make the most of it. Even before the fort was established at the junction of the Big Horn and the Yellowstone, and while the company was making its way up the Yellowstone, a party was sent out to locate the richest beaver streams and trap so far as opportunity offered. Fitzpatrick, Sublette, and Smith, all of them ever eager for new adventure, were among the number, Smith and Fitzpatrick being placed in command. After scouting around together for a week or more, another division was made, Smith leading five men toward the west; and Fitzpatrick, with the remainder following up the river valley towards the headwaters of the Powder and the Platte. Arrangements were made for the two parties to meet later on at an appointed place and march on to their winter quarters on the Yellowstone.

And now again occurred one of those thrilling episodes that so frequently marked life on the plains in that early period. The victim this time was Smith who narrowly escaped with his life. The incident is a second Hugh Glass story with Smith and a grizzly occupying the center of the stage.

One evening as Smith was returning from setting his beaver traps, a huge bear felled him to the ground and when he came to himself again, he was

at the camp with his companions acting as surgeons and physicians to his torn and bedraggled form. Several days at least must elapse before he could go on his way, so two of his companions were left to nurse him and care for him while the remaining three went in search of Fitzpatrick and his men. In the meantime, the two companions of Smith spent their leisure hours trapping beaver which were plentiful in that region.

And now comes the second and more tragic phase of the situation. While Smith sat at the camp-fire in the early evening twilight ruminating over the situation and listening to the horses munching the grass and twigs near by, he heard shots in the direction whence his comrades had gone but half an hour before. Shrill cries and a succession of shots told only too impressively the story which was confirmed a few minutes later when the Indians with savage yells came rushing down the stream, displaying two dripping scalps. At the first shots and shrieks Smith had, in spite of aches and wounds, dragged himself out into the thicket nearby, and with gun in hand watched anxiously for coming events. Fortunately, the Indians after looting the camp and stealing the horses, rode off without having discovered Smith, who, alone and suffering from the wounds, passed through the long weary night. Eight days more of suffering and suspense and his anxiety was relieved by the arrival of Colonel Reemle of the Missouri Fur Co. with a band of trappers, led by the three men who had gone in search of Fitzpatrick and his men.

Out of these varied experiences, new measures and new hopes were born, and insistent purposes awakened. The old method of trading posts established

19. A brief but interesting sketch of Colonel Reemle is found in Edwards, Great West, pp 171-172.

20. The reader who is interested in thrilling tales should read "Jed Wrestles with Death", Chap. IX, in Heihardt, The Splendid Wayfaring. Smith's experiences during these ten days are graphically related in this chapter.

by Manuel Lisa and members of the Missouri Fur Co. was to be displaced by the rendezvous, and white trappers were to catch their own beaver rather than purchase from the Indians through barter and trade. Then, too, Fitzpatrick had learned from the Indians (Crow) of an easy passage over the mountains to the unknown regions beyond. These matters were talked over by the men at the camp and their adventurous imaginations were fired with new visions of exploration and conquest, and perhaps fortunes in furs. The spring and summer season was to see the mists clear away from the wastes beyond, and a new pathway opened up over the almost impassable Rockies.

How important this more accessible route was to become may be disclosed by a brief reference once again to the Anglo-American controversy over the northwest region and the advantages of each for settlement and permanent possession; for be it remembered that traders and trappers followed by settlers have generally in the course of history, decided the question of ownership which mere diplomacy or attempted purchase could not solve. So with reference to Oregon and the Great Basin, it was a matter of exploration and actual settlement. If the Americans were to compete successfully in the field, they must find some more accessible route than that followed by Lewis and Clarke. Otherwise the barrier between them and their "manifest destiny" would give to their English competitors who could more easily come down from the north, such an advantage that the prophecy of the Hudson Bay Factor at Vancouver, the renowned Dr. John McLoughlin, would likely come true.

Reverend I. D. Driver in an address delivered in 1887 before the Pioneer Association, thus referred to McLoughlin:

"He used to say to Reverend J. L. Parrish: 'For all coming time we and our children will have uninterrupted possession of this country, as it can never be reached by

families, but by water around Cape Horn! Mr. Parrish went on to say, being an eastern man, 'Before we die we will see the Yankees coming across the mountains with their teams and families.' The Doctor said: 'As well might they undertake to go to the moon.'

When a train finally camped on this side of the Cascades, he went and conversed with emigrants, saw the dilapidated wagons, torn covers, jaded animals and sunburned women and children, and when meeting Parrish on his return said: 'God forgive me Parrish! But the Yankees are here and the first thing you know they will yoke up their oxen and drive to the mouth of the Columbia and come out at Japan.'" 21

Again, Thomas J. Farnham, in describing the rivers and pathways that intersect the great Prairie wilderness and finally make it possible to get over the Rocky Mountain barrier, thus speaks of the Platte river and the South Pass:

"The Platte therefore when considered in relation to our intercourse with the habitable countries on the Western Ocean assumes an unequalled importance among the streams of the Great Prairie Wilderness. But for it, it would be impossible for man or beast to travel those arid plains, destitute alike of wood, water, and grass, save what of each is found along its course. Upon the headwaters of its North Fork, too, is the only way or opening in the Rocky Mountains at all practicable for a carriage road through them. That traversed by Lewis and Clarke is covered by perpetual snow; that near the debouchre of the South Fork of the river is over high and nearly impassable precipices; that traveled by myself farther south, is and ever will be impassable for carriages. But the Great Gap, (South Pass) nearly on a right line between the mouth of the Missouri and Fort Hall on Clarkes river -- the point where the trails to California and Oregon diverge -- seems designed by nature as the great gateway between nations on the Atlantic and Pacific seas." 22

This is in line with the statement of Turner, that "this pass (South Pass) commanded the routes to the great interior basin and to the Pacific Ocean. What Cumberland Gap was in the advance of settlement across

21. S. A. Clarke, Pioneer Days of Oregon. Vol. II, p 213.

22. Thos. J. Farnham, Travels in the Great Western Prairies, the Anhuac and the Rocky Mountains and in the Oregon Territory. Chap. III, p 23.

Entered according to act of Congress in the year of our Lord, eighteen hundred and forty-three, by Thomas J. Farnham, in the clerks office of the Southern District of New York. 18-19, p 45.

the Alleghanies, South Pass was in the movement across the Rocky Mountains;
23
through it passed the later Oregon and California trails."

The debates in Congress in 1822 indicate that many of our public men felt that without some such gateway through the Rockies our western limits must stop there. Indeed some seemed to accept Dr. McLoughlin's version of the case. Tracy, representative from New York doubted the value of the whole Oregon country and declared that "nature has fixed limits for our nation; she has kindly introduced as our western barrier, mountains almost
24
inaccessible, whose base she has skirted with irreclaimable deserts of sand."

The Congressional debates over the Oregon question in 1824-1828, and even as late as 1848, exhibit this same lack of sympathy with the projects of western development, and this same sense of the "impossible" in attempting to connect industrially or politically the Rocky Mountain and Pacific west with the rest of the United States.

To understand the amazing lack of appreciation of the Oregon country and the western prairies in general, one should read, in connection with these debates, Long's description of the prairies as "wholly unfit for cultivation".
25
This picture of the so-called American desert hung like a pall over the whole west, and dominated the thinking of many of our public men. Utterances similar to those quoted might be multiplied. Mr. Dickerson, in an ironical vein, opposed the measure before Congress in 1824 and presented figures to show that it was 4,703 miles from the capital at Washington to the mouth of the Columbia river and that, supposing an Oregon State created, it would

23. Frederick J. Turner, Rise of the New West, p 119.

24. Annals of Congress, 17 Cong., 2 ses., p 590.

25. Long's Expedition, (Edition compiled by Edwin James 1823) Vol. II, p 361.

take a representative one year to make the trip to Washington, stay two weeks and go back home. Besides, he maintained "the country is worthless." 26
A careful reading of all debates in Congress, 1824-1828-1829, on the question of the occupation of the Oregon region will reward one richly. Arguments pro and con are enforced by reference to the statements of fur traders and 27
trappers. Opponents of the measure seemed to get comfort from Long.

From what has been said in the foregoing it would appear that actual performance must be the final arbiter of the question. The whole disputed region, both that claimed jointly by England and America, and the inland basin region and California, which passed to Mexico after the revolution of 1819-1821, would finally fall into possession of the nation that explored it and occupied it. The impossible must be made possible, the impassable, passable, and the valueless, valuable.

In the winter and spring of 1823-1824 plans were formed and movements initiated, that were to be followed by far-reaching consequences in the direction of a wider American expansion. At this particular time little was known of the upper stretches of the streams tributary to the Missouri; and the inland country between Spanish California and the Rockies was, aside from the explorations on the southern and northern rim as described above, virtually a blank. All this was changed by the discovery and utilization of the South Pass, and subsequent penetration of the Bear and Weber river valleys to the Great Salt Lake.

26. Annals of Congress, loc. cit.

27. Thos. H. Penton, op, cit. p 13.

The spring hunt in 1824 began early, probably in February. Various parties were sent out, Fitzpatrick, himself, leading the group, of which Major Henry was also a member. This party moved up the Big Horn to Wind river, and from thence to the highway through which some years later emigrant trains were to pass in almost a continuous stream carrying settlers and state builders to the regions beyond. This, of course, is the famous South Pass, the discovery of which has been claimed by others.

Before considering these counter claims, it may be well to note the immediate results of this new enterprise. After going over the Pass, the company went down the Big Sandy and thence to Green River where a country rich in furs was located. The trappers were so successful and so completely absorbed in catching beaver in the various tributaries of Green river, that it is said they paid little attention to the stealing of all their horses by Snake Indians. In fact for sometime after, they kept accumulating peltries until they had gathered such a wealth of them they concluded it was time to begin to think of some way of getting them out. Accordingly, after casking²³ their catch, they set out for the Indian village where they successfully conducted a surprise attack, recovering all their horses and some twenty more belonging to the Indians.

Time was now an important matter, as the Indians would be on their trail, so they hastily packed and commenced their journey back over the now familiar route through the newly discovered pass to the headwaters of the

23. Fitzpatrick, in a letter to Ashley who was in St. Louis at this period, relates the success of the trappers on these streams. St. Louis Reveille, March 1, 1847. Cited by Dale, p 115.

Sweetwater. Here skin boats were constructed and Fitzpatrick made a pioneer trip down this stream losing some of his furs when his boats were capsized in the rapids near the mouth of the river. From this point, he hastened on to Fort Atkinson, leaving his precious packs behind to be brought down later by pack horses. From this point he sent dispatches to Ashley, reporting the new discoveries and recent successes.

It will be recalled that Henry was with Fitzpatrick and his men when they discovered and passed over the South Pass, and began operations in the Green River region. It seems he stayed only a few weeks, however, and then started back on a return trip to St. Louis. The route he traveled cannot be ascertained in detail, but it appears he recrossed the South Pass, went north to the Big Horn, thence down the Yellowstone to the Missouri and from thence by boat to St. Louis. As his ventures with Ashley up to this time had not proved flatteringly successful he apparently decided to turn his attention to others. At least he sold his interests to Ashley and henceforth is not concerned with the operations of the fur traders. It remained for Ashley to back up financially and personally the new possibilities now opening up, and to push to successful conclusion the enterprise he had been instrumental in inaugurating in 1822. Rich fields were smiling invitingly through the new pathway, and Ashley and the daring company he had gathered around him were not the ones to turn back.

Now concerning the discovery of this famous pass there is considerable controversy. Whether or not the Astorians discovered it twelve years earlier than its discovery by the Ashley men, it can truly be said that it did not become a common highway until now. This fact, in itself, is presumptive evidence against the claims of the Astorians. However, there is some rather

Direct evidence that this achievement should be accredited to them. Elliot Coues, 1897, after carefully tracing their route in his edition of the Henry Thompson Journals, comes to the conclusion that the claims made for them are well grounded.²⁹ However, one year later, 1898, in his edition of "Forty Years a Fur Trader" he says an attentive reconsideration of the question in connection with Chittenden has led him to change his opinion. His revised route brings them across the divide some ten or fifteen miles south of the Pass.³⁰ To this later opinion Dale seems to agree; this, too, in spite of the fact that Ramsey Crooks, one of the Astorians living in New York in 1856, makes direct claim to the discovery by the Stuart company.

The question at that time, 1856, arose over the nomination by the new Republican party of John C. Fremont for President of the U. S. Certain of his friends hoping to boost his chances for election claimed for him the discovery of the South Pass. In the light of present knowledge this would be absurd. Still Coues could say in 1897, "if I am right in this matter of the South Pass, these men, (the returning Astorians) thus discovered it long before Fremont rediscovered it."³¹ Coues thus passes over Fitzpatrick and Provot and the Ashley-Henry group. Chittenden, too, in his American Fur Trade, 1902, passes over Fitzpatrick and quotes tradition as ascribing the discovery to Provot, but finds no positive proof of the claim.³² But when this claim was made for Fremont, Crooks was indignant and wrote the letter asserting positively the claims of the Astorians. Was he reading back into the event the conclusions of later times? At any rate, Dale, who has given most careful consideration to all the evidence and close and accurate observa-

29. Elliot Coues, New Light on the Earlier History of the Great Northwest. New York, 1897, p 884, footnote.

30. Elliot Coues, Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri. Larpenieur, pp 28-29, footnote.

31. Elliot Coues, op. cit.

32. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p 271.

tion to the routes, agrees with Chittenden and the later opinion of Coues.

The fact of the matter is that while there can be no question as to the sincerity of Ramsey Crooks, the then (1856) only surviving members of the Astorians -- he surely believed the little company were the true discoverers of the South Pass -- there is evidence of a certain lapse of memory. 34 He says they passed over the divide in November, while Irving, in tracing them in their travels from day to day has them cross the divide on the 22nd of September. This little inaccuracy in date is not in itself weighty, but in following the route carefully as Irving gives it, one can scarcely fail to agree with Chittenden, Coues, and Dale. For instance the description of their travels on the 22nd September -- they made only eight miles this day-- would not indicate a pathway over which wagons could be easily taken. 35 Says 36 Irving, "At daybreak they were up and on the march, scrambling up the mountainside for eight painful miles, -- after pausing to repose, and to enjoy these grand but savage scenes, they began to descend the eastern side of the mountain. The descent was rugged and romantic, along deep ravines and defiles overhung with crags and cliffs." This hardly suggests an easy wagon route. But furthermore, had they come through the Pass they would have struck the headwaters of the Sweetwater river directly, but instead they did not reach that stream until September 26, four days later, and then by traveling east and northeast, which would indicate that they were a number of miles south of the Pass when they crossed the divide.

Fitzpatrick, however, does not rest altogether secure in his honors.

33. Dale, "Did the Returning Astorians Use the South Pass?" Oregon Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. XVII.

34. See this letter in Dale, op. cit. It was taken by Dale from the Deseret News of Nov. 5, 1866, (Salt Lake City). Previous to its publication by the Deseret News, it had appeared in the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit Advertiser.

35. Irving, Astoria, revised one vol. edition, N.Y. 1860, pp 306-412.

36. Irving, ibid, p 409.

There is a persistent tradition that Etienne Provot preceded him over this now famous pass, in the year 1823. Joseph Schafer of the University of Oregon in his work gives credence to the tradition without qualification. 37

While positive and conclusive evidence cannot be produced against the tradition, it seems to open serious doubt. To the writer, Dale's reasoning from known facts is clear and rather convincing. He concludes that until further light is thrown on the subject, the honors must go to Fitzpatrick. 38

The basis of this conclusion is substantially as follows: Provot operated during at least a part of the year 1823 around the Mandan villages. It will be remembered that Henry, who outfitted Provot and companions, was at the Aricara villages in the summer of this year, in connection with the Leavenworth campaign. He and his party did not leave these villages until late in August, and reached the mouth of the Big Horn in early September. 40 It seems improbable, to say the least, that Provot undertook this late in the season, to cross over to the Green river country. Moreover, in 1824 he lost eight men of the Colorado (Green river) and the next year a man on Weber Fork, and in April of the same year he was in the Uintah mountain. If then he discovered the South Pass in 1823, he must either have pushed into the Green river or interior basin country in the fall of that year and stayed there until the spring of 1825 when Ashley joined him near Weber river, or after having crossed the Pass in the late fall of 1823, received there fresh supplies from Henry of which no mention is made, and remained

37. Jos. Schafer, Ph.D. History of the Pacific Northwest, p 102, 1921 edition.

38. Dale, The Ashley-Smith Explorations, pp 93-95.

39. "Casualty List" - Supt. of Indian Affairs, Letter Book, 1830-1832. Kansas Historical Society Mss. quoted by Dale.

40. G. W. Dodge, (Biographical Sketch of James Bridger) says that he reached the mouth of the Yellowstone Aug. 23. From thence he proceeded up the Yellowstone to the Big Horn.

another year there or further west, this, too, in spite of the loss of some ten men. Taking into account all the circumstances, it seems much more reasonable to suppose that Provot and his party set out in the summer of 1824 with the other divisions of Ashley's men and after crossing the mountains pushed into the interior basin waters where they remained until
41
Ashley joined them in 1825.

Counting the substantial accuracy of the foregoing account of Fitzpatrick and his party, it is reasonable to conclude that Provot accompanied Ashley's men in the summer of 1824, on their adventures over the divide to the new western trapping grounds. It is certain there were two divisions of the Ashley group operating in different sections, viz, a small company comprising only six men and led by Jedediah S. Smith, and a much larger company under the command of Wm. L. Sublette. James Bridger accompanied the latter group with significant results as will be seen later. A third division was more than likely formed of Provot and LeClerc and their men. They all traveled together, however, until reaching the tributaries of the
42
Green river. At the head of the Sweet-water they met Fitzpatrick returning with his rich store of furs. From them they would likely hear marvelous stories of the new gateway and the rich beaver country beyond. With anxious expectancy they then traveled on together over the Pass and on to the waters of the two Sandys where they separated.

43

The travels of Smith and his men can be quite accurately traced.

41. This reasoning follows Dale's closely but in reaching conclusions, the writer has examined the evidence so far as possible and thus become convinced of the correctness of this view of the case. The question, however, is still an open one.

42. St. Louis Reveille, March 1, 1847, cited by Dale, The Ashley-Smith Explorations, p 95.

43. Alexander Ross, Journal of the Snake River Expedition, 1824, in Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XIV, p 385. Ross, Fur Hunters of the Far West, Vol. II, p 127. Washington Hood's Original Draft of a Report of a Practical Route for Wheeled Vehicles across the Mountains, written at Independence, Aug. 12, 1839, contains a detailed account of route taken. Ashley's narrative also furnishes details. Dale, 117 ff.

they had a variety of experiences, some of them extremely profitable, and perhaps, questionable. Their connection with the Hudson Bay Company through the Iroquois incident⁴⁴ and their subsequent relations with Alexander Ross, Peter Skeen Ogden, and others at the Flathead House merged their history with that of the Hudson Bay Company for that period and thus gave it a wider publicity than it otherwise might have had.

With the varied interesting details of their wanderings we are not directly concerned in this narrative, only so far as they relate to subsequent explorations in the Great Basin.

On the return journey which eventually led Smith into the interior basin, he and his little band probably set out with Peter Skeen Ogden and the Snake river expedition of 1824-1825: Subsequent events will disclose the importance of this southward movement.

In leaving Smith at this point it can hardly be amiss to quote Dale on the importance of this expedition. He thus sums it up:

"The importance of this first expedition of Smith lies in the fact that he was the first American of whom there is definite information, since Lewis and Clarke, to cross the continental divide within the area lying north and west of the Three Forks of the Missouri. He was the first since Andrew Henry, in 1810, to explore the Columbia drainage area just south of the Three Forks, the country, that is to say, of Pierre's Hole and the upper Salmon river. He was the first American since the Astorians to follow the course of the Hoback river and to cross Jackson's Hole and the Tetons. He linked up and summarized the work that had been done by isolated

44. The substance of this incident is about as follows: Smith and his men trapped with considerable success the upper stretches of Green river and the tributaries of the Snake river. They then crossed over to the Lewis Fork of the Columbia and thence to Clark's Fork, finally running on to a party of Iroquois led by one Pierre, who was leading this detachment of the Snake river expedition under the general direction of Alexander Ross. When Smith found them they were in a sorry plight.

groups of Americans before him, and extended American exploration of the Cordilleras from the South Pass to the North Pass of Lewis and Clarke." 45

The meanderings of Sublette and his men after the separation of the parties are not so easily traced. They are of peculiar significance, however, since they mark the initiatory movements of the Ashley-Smith men in the mysterious and little known inland basin which, south of Bear Lake to Salt Lake, was still practically terra incognita. Just how they got into the Basin will not be subject for speculation at this point. Suffice it to say that they spent the winter of 1824-1825 in Cache Valley which they, in all probability, entered by way of Bear river.

Now as to Etienne Provot, whose movements seem to be shrouded somewhat in mystery, it must be said that there is still lack of positive knowledge concerning him between the year 1824-1825. But he was certainly familiar with Weber river and vicinity when Ashley met him in the spring of 1825. His route seems to have been up Green river to one of its eastward flowing tributaries which he followed for some distance, and thence going westward he reached the Weber, which he followed down to Great Salt Lake where he wintered and where seven of his men were killed.

44. (cont.) Smith, although distinguished generally for his Christian piety and high sense of justice, seemingly in this instance made their misfortunes his opportunity, and relieved them of their remaining furs in return for piloting them through a region he himself was not familiar with, to the vicinity of Pierre's Hole where it was expected they would meet Ross and the main party of trappers. Fortunately they had not gone far before falling in with a party of Ross's men sent out in search of the Iroquois party. The united parties were soon conducted to Ross's headquarters at the junction of the Salmon and Pahsimari rivers in what is now Custer Co., Idaho. Ross, in his account of the incident has some unsavory things to say about the manner in which the furs were secured from the Iroquois, but is, nevertheless, impressed with the qualities of leadership exhibited by Smith. (See Ross, Journal in Oregon Historical Quarterly, also Ross, Fur Hunters in the Far West. Vol. II, p 127. See ref. in preceding chapter.

45. Dale, op. cit. pp 99-100.

Did he reach this lake before winter set in? If so, he probably should be credited with its first discovery. The various claims to this distinction will be considered in a later chapter. The substantial facts remain that the Ashley-Smith men are now, 1824-1825, well within the Basin region and soon to make definite reports about the country and the remarkable lake which ever since has been of prime interest to the scientist, geologist, and historian.

These discoveries and varied activities west of the divide are the outgrowth of a new policy inaugurated by Ashley in the summer of 1824. The idea or purpose of this new scheme was, no doubt, greatly accentuated by the discovery of the South Pass and the flattering report made by Fitzpatrick to Ashley from Fort Atkinson --- a report noted previously. It is but fair to state, however, that the plan which had for its basic feature, the rendezvous and white trappers in lieu of trading posts and Indian trappers, had been adopted and practiced in a small way by others, notably the Northwest and Hudson Bay companies. But it remained for Ashley to develop and utilize the plan on a large scale and in new fields previously explored.

While it cannot properly be said that the old field of the upper Missouri region was exhausted of its beaver, yet it was particularly fortunate that opportunities now offered themselves in other directions.

Up to the spring of 1824 the success of the Ashley ventures had been far from flattering. We have seen that Henry lost heart and sold out his interests to Ashley. Various causes contributed to the discouragement and lent wings to the new venture. The North Pass was rather an obstruction

46. Dale, Ashley-Smith Explorations, footnote, p 91. Citations from H. J. Weyth and Joshua Pilcher.

than a temptation to the region beyond. Furthermore, the Indians, particularly the Blackfeet, were a constant menace, strikingly illustrated by the loss of twenty-five men killed and as many more wounded to say nothing of the loss of thousands of dollars in property. Then too, the competition of rival companies, the Missouri Fur Co., the Columbia Fur Co., and various other smaller concerns, was intense and becoming more active. If huge profits were to accrue some more inviting region must be found and new methods employed.

Earlier mention has been made in this review of new method of conducting business. In general up to this time furs were secured largely through barter with the Indians. That is the Indians caught the beaver and brought the peltries to conveniently located posts where the traders secured them at the best terms possible. Chittenden enumerates and briefly describes some one hundred and forty such posts in the country west of St. Louis between 1807-1843. Many of these posts were being abandoned, and the custom was growing of using free trappers. The utility of the trading post lessened as the area of activity widened and extended. Especially did it become apparent that such posts and methods could not be carried successfully over the mountains. In lieu thereof the rendezvous and small bands of free white trappers or groups trapping for the Companies at some fixed salary were substituted. This furnished a spur to further adventure, and added romance to business and courageous enterprise.

The rendezvous was simply a gathering place, the point at which the various trapping parties, scattered in various fields and widely separated areas during the hunting season, might gather and cache their

peltries and receive fresh supplies. It was a portable affair, and might be moved with the changing fields of business. In locating it, however, convenience for the various trappers must be related to the question of accessibility to the transportation routes. In other words, the matter of reaching it with supplies must be taken into account. Unlike the post, then, which was more or less permanent, it required no one to stay and look after it and it could shift with the shifting business.

At times the rendezvous became a veritable mushroom village, a community in the desert or wilderness surrounded by savages and wild beasts. Here would assemble the trappers, many of them with their Indian wives and children, and here their gregarious instincts could be gratified and their social and primitive impulses indulged in a jolly albeit "happy-go-lucky" fashion. The squaws gathered the wood, made the fires, cooked the meals, mended the clothes, etc., while the men hunted and brought in the game to supply the necessities, and spent their leisure spinning tales of hazard and adventure, or competing in the various sports of camp life.

In some instances the rendezvous lasted for months and the number gathered in would make a good sized country village. One such settlement near or on the present site of Ogden City, Utah, contained some seven hundred souls, who spent there the winter of 1825-1826. These were the pathfinders, the forerunners of settlements, which, in the course of a quarter of a century, were to dot this whole fertile region. On this very spot now, instead of the smoke from the camp fires and the howl of the

47. Dale, Ashley-Smith Explorations, p 166. See also Bonner, Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwith, Chap. VII, p 75 ff. Beckwith describes the rendezvous at the suck of Green river. Victor, Rivers of the West, pp 36-37 --- also gives a vivid description of a rendezvous.

coyote, one sees the smoke from factories and hears the hum of machinery and whistles of industry, and finds all the other adjuncts of our modern, social and industrial civilization. And here, too, centers the terminus of railroads reaching in their ramifications all parts of the country. Here was driven in 1869, the gold spike that meant the linking of the Atlantic and the Pacific by the great transcontinental railroad, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific. It is still a rendezvous in that it is an assembling place for supplies that are carried out through the arteries of trade into remote corners and nooks of the basin. Not all rendezvous were as prophetic of the future as this one, but certainly the one at Great Salt Lake was of equal significance.

But all this is, at this point, mere illustrative of the character and importance of the rendezvous in the development of the west, and suggestive of discoveries and explorations that must now be treated more in detail. The discovery of the South Pass and the rivers beyond, the fruitful results from trapping these streams, the new harbor of refuge for rendezvous --- all this was but a prelude to the following decade of activity in these regions.

Not alone in the interior basin and the basin of the Pacific slope, both of which then belonged to Mexico, did the Ashley interests pioneer the way for future American development, but they gave strong expression to future American rivalry with the British in the Columbia river drainage area, the much disputed Oregon country. But this matter does not properly come within the scope of the present article; the discovery of the Great Salt Lake and the opening up of the interior basin are of chief concern here.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISCOVERY OF THE GREAT SALT LAKE

Following closely the discovery of the South Pass was that of the Great Salt Lake, an event of far-reaching consequence in the development of the Interior Basin. Not only was the lake itself of great interest to geologists and geographers and scientists generally, but the explorations made in connection with its discovery dissipated the vagaries concerning the character of this whole vast area, and furnished for the first time correct information in relation to the topography of the region lying between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean.

The facts connected with its first discovery cannot be marshalled with any great accuracy of detail, and hence there has arisen considerable controversy as to who should be credited with primacy in the matter. Like many other events in human history, this achievement is interwoven in the experiences of a number of men whose contributions were almost simultaneous. One thing, however, is certain, so far as present knowledge is concerned, the hunters and trappers of the first quarter of the nineteenth century were the first white men to gaze upon this vast inland sea. Just which one of them should be credited with the honors is not, perhaps, of great moment. Yet the question is a mooted one and should not be passed over too lightly.

Not until 1824-1825 is there any positive proof of the Lake having been visited by anyone other than the Indians. In that year Ashley's men and the free trappers outfitted by him and Andrew Henry,

acting in pursuance of their new policy of scattering small groups over remote sections of the country to catch their own beaver rather than to purchase from the Indians as had been the custom, trapped on practically all of the streams tributary to the upper reaches of the Green River, and over the Uintah and Wasatch ranges to the head of the streams, which, when followed, led to the mysterious Lake. So it happened that various groups finally formed rendezvous on its shores or in river valleys near it.

To be sure, rumors of this lake had circulated for more than half a century. Father Escalante, who entered Utah Valley near what is now Utah Lake, 1776, was told by the Indians of a lake farther north, the waters of which "are very harmful and very salty".¹ As early as 1811 a map engraved for "Cuthries New System of Geography" and drawn from "the best authorities" -- a map representing the known portions of the continent at that time, locates a rather large lake in very nearly the same latitude and longitude as Great Salt Lake. On this map the lake has no outlet, a very unusual item of fact to be presented at this early date; for the error that this lake had a river outlet to the Pacific persisted rather widely until the late 30's. On this map there is no name, but what is most remarkable is the following inscription. "Lake, etc., hand drawn by Mr. Lawrence, who is said to have traveled through this country to California in 1790-1791". Who is Mr. Lawrence? Whence came this report? What is its basis of fact? As it stands alone on this single piece of evidence it cannot be accepted.² Yet it is very suggestive and should leave room for suspended judgment.

1. Dean, W. R. Harris, The Catholic Church in Utah, Salt Lake City, 1909, p. 182.

2. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p. 794.

After Escalante's entrada into the heart of the basin in 1776, perhaps no one approached as near the Great Salt Lake again until 1811-1812, and there is no positive evidence that the lake itself was discovered until 1824. In the meantime, however, there are some probabilities worthy of consideration. The returning Astorians, who passed so near to, if not over the South Pass in 1812, found just below Caldron Linn, Miller, Hoback, Rezner, and Robinson, four of the five men who quit the company at Fort Henry the previous year. These men had had a checked and almost tragic experience. In fact, Irving drops the veiled hint that Cass, according to rumors that floated about later, might have been a victim to the desperate state of hunger to which the little party had been reduced in their wanderings. However that may be, the party had in their long wilderness meanderings been twice attacked and robbed by the Indians and finally reduced to such straits that only their fortunate connection with the returning Astorians saved them from destruction.

In order to get away from hostile Indians, they had gone far south, some two hundred miles according to their own story, and trapped upon a stream which discharged itself into the ocean south of the Columbia. Irving concludes this stream was Bear River and the body of water, Great Salt Lake, or Lake Bonneville as he terms it. From this it can be inferred that it was barely possible that they reached Salt Lake and mistook it for the Pacific. We have no coherent or detailed account of

3. Irving, Astoria, revised edition, New York, 1866, pp. 375-376. Irving probably received information from near by sources other than the journals of Ross, Cox, and Franchere.

4. Irving, loc. cit. p. 375 cf. Chap. II, this narrative.

their wanderings however, --- only Irving's rehearsal from sources not
5
now available. As no consequences of geographical value followed from
their discoveries, it is more reasonable to suppose that if they trapped
on Bear River at all they did not follow it down to its mouth. But it
does seem fair to conclude that they penetrated the interior basin, and
trapped on some of its waters. If they had discovered the lake it would
in all probability have been given more publicity and more definite in-
terest would have been awakened.

More to the point are the claims that have been put forward in
behalf of Peter Skeen Ogden of the Hudson Bay Company. He has stamped
his name indelibly around the region of Salt Lake, Moreover, the other
Hudson Bay traders preceded Ogden in the region of Bear River and fur-
nish rather accurate and incontrovertible evidence of explorations not
very remote from Salt Lake. By 1819 some of these penetrated the in-
terior farther south than anyone had been before them, unless perchance
the Astorians can make good their claim. One of these intrepid hunters,
Donald McKenzie, had been in the region of the upper Snake River with the
Astorians. In 1818-1819 he led the first two of the self supporting Snake
River expeditions under the new method of sending out parties or brigades
for rather long periods to trap and cache furs until, according to a pre-
arranged plan, they could all be gathered in to a common point for shipment,
in the case of the Hudson Bay Company, to the mouth of the Columbia.

5. Irving probably received information from nearby sources other than
the journals of Ross, and Cox, and Franchere.

This, it will be seen at once, is very similar to the plan executed under Ashley's direction, on a larger scale and with the rendezvous more perfectly developed.

On the second of these expeditions, that of 1819, McKenzie resolved to examine the country farther south and visit and have interview with the chiefs of the Snake nation. In pursuit of this purpose he set out and soon came upon the main body of the Snake nation, though just where it is difficult to determine with definiteness. In September, however, he was at Bear Lake, some forty miles from the Great Salt Lake, where he wrote a letter to Alexander Ross, dated September 10, 1819. This is perhaps as far south as he went at this time, and farther south than any of his predecessors had gone before. Harris, therefore, is mistaken when he states:

"That many representatives of that extraordinary and marvellously hardy class of men known as 'Coureurs de Bois' preceded the English speaking trappers and hunters we know from the journals of the Hudson Bay Company whose post at Ogden, Utah had existed before Provot and Bridger first camped in the Green River Valley in 1823. The Snake chief who treacherously attacked Provot and his men at the mouth of the Provo River in the Autumn of 1824, was known as 'Mauvais Gauche' (the man with the bad left hand), a suggestive name conferred upon him by the French Canadian trappers of the Wasatch region many years before, and many of whom had probably visited Salt Lake before Jim Bridger sampled its waters in 1823." (Underlining mine.)

In this brief summary are several inaccuracies and un-

6. Alexander Ross, Fur Hunters of the Far West, Vol. I. p 248. Cf. Chapter II, this narrative.

7. W. R. Harris, Catholic Church in Utah, p 258.

supported inferences. There is nothing to prove that Canadian Coureurs de Bois, discovered Salt Lake, important as their hazardous wanderings were to geographical knowledge and subsequent exploration and settlement. Furthermore, Jim Bridger did not sample the waters of Salt Lake in 1823, but in the late fall of 1824. Neither did the Hudson Bay Company have a post at Ogden, Utah, before Bridger and Provot camped in the Green River valley in 1823 (?) nor did Provot and his men meet with any attack from the Indians at the mouth of the Provo River in 1824, or at any other time.

But now again to the point of this discussion. It is evident that McKenzie did not reach the lake though approaching the vicinity rather closely. The Snake River expeditions following between 1819-1823 were over familiar ground. These were under the command of McKenzie and McKonald respectively. In 1824, Alexander Ross, the new commander at the Flathead House, made a rather extended and circuitous tour around the Blackfoot country in to the valley of the Bitterroot, over on to the Salmon River and from thence south into unfamiliar country. It was this company, with whom Smith, in company with the Iroquois from whom it will be recalled, some ninehundred veaver pelts had been secured, traveled to the Flathead House where he met Peter Skeen Ogden, Ross' successor. The next five Snake River expeditions were under Ogden's command. This marks his first appearance in the Snake River and Wasatch regions so there could have been no Ogden post on the shores of Salt Lake

8. Dale has cleared up all these mooted points in his Ashley-Smith Explorations.

9. Ross, Fur Hunters of the Far West, Vol. II. p 13, says he and his company took the unfamiliar route to escape the dangers of the Blackfeet.

previous to this year, 1824. It has also been shown that no Hudson Bay people had gone farther south than Bear Lake from whence McKenzie wrote Ross in 1819, although Chittenden says in reference to McKenzie and his trappers around the head waters of the Snake, "it seems scarcely possible that so large a trapping party could have passed so much time in this vicinity without discovering Great Salt Lake." ¹⁰ The actual documentary evidence, however, is against the inference.

But the season 1824-1825 is a signal one in the line of actual discovery and exploration. This fruitful year will now be viewed in connection with the varied and rival activities that mark it off from previous years.

RIVALRY 1824-1825

In the year 1824, Peter Skeen Ogden was placed in command of the Hudson Bay Company at the Flathead House and for the next five years he and his men were active in the rich region of the Snake River and over the divide into the interior basin. Five definite Snake River expeditions were conducted by him during the period, and on the first of these it has been thought that he discovered the Great Salt Lake. Unfortunately, the journal of this year 1824-1825 is lost and conclusions reached are based on inference and reason rather than direct evidence. It seems, too, that opinions based on the same evidence differ. However, the journals that have come to light, it seems, under careful scrutiny, offer pretty positive presumptive proof against the contention

10. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p 795.

of the discovery before 1825, Miss Agnes Lant has brought to light the
Ogden journals from the late fall of 1825 to the fall of 1829. In the
journals for the year 1825-1826 is the record of the event which suggested to the editor, Mr. T. C. Elliot, that Ogden probably discovered the
lake in 1824-1825. The entry referred to is as follows. Ogden Journal,
June 2, 1826:

"Proceeded but a short distance when
we met with a Snake. This Indian I saw
last year on Bear River; it was this rascal
who headed the party who pillaged us two years
ago."

Commenting directly on the statement "This Indian I saw last
year on Bear River", Elliot says in a foot note, "Probably the date
of Mr. Ogden's first trip to Great Salt Lake."

This inference is based upon the assumption that Ogden followed
the Bear River down to its mouth that year. But there is no recorded
evidence that he did so. In fact, the argument of silence forbids the
conclusion. Of course, the lost journal of 1824-1825 must be taken into
account. If it could be found, the record might be clear.

But a careful reading of the Ogden journals for the year 1828-
1829 leads one to conclude that the lost journal would disclose nothing

11. T. C. Elliot has edited these journals in Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vols. X-XI, 1909-1910. (Note, the activities of Ogden will be treated in detail in a subsequent chapter).

12. Elliot says: "It is certain that Mr. Ogden's party trapped along the various streams forming the headwaters of the Snake River, and in all probability, (it is not yet possible to say with certainty) then penetrated to the Borders of the Great Salt Lake, and the river and valley afterward named in his honor. The entry of June 6, (2) 1826, (ultra) suggests this. --- American authorities generally so accredit Ogden. See Bancroft, History of Utah, pp. 21-22.

concerning the discovery of the lake. In fact Elliot himself in editing the journal for this year cautiously uses the word "possibly" instead of his former word "probably". It was this silence that caused Elliot to waver. Why should Ogden never mention his discovery of Salt Lake after 1826, if he made any such discovery? The argument of silence is supported by still more effective evidence. Ogden in 1829, when approaching Salt Lake writes as though he were ignorant of the country, as one who is describing the region for the first time. Dale sums up in what appears to me clear and forceful reasoning the evidence from the journal that seems conclusively to prove this. He thus concludes his reasoning:

"Ogden knew of the existence of the Great Salt Lake as early as 1826 and it is not unlikely that he with Ross and McKenzie before him had heard of it even earlier. That he or they had visited it, however, seems highly improbable."

One should read the journal, however, to feel the force of the argument. In December, 1828, a Snake Indian guided him over the divide between the Snake River and the interior basin, and Ogden records the fact that the Indian tells him they are getting in the Uta's country not far from Salt Lake. This is apparently received as new information. On the 26th of December, Ogden and his men had a distant view of Salt Lake, and on the 28th of December he wrote, "Here we are at the end of Great Salt Lake, having this season explored one half of the north side of it and can safely assert as the Americans have of the south side, that it is a barren country destitute of everything." Furthermore, on January 5,

13. Dale, op.cit. pp 46-47.

of the new year, he wrote of what must have been the Malad River. "I cannot ascertain if this stream discharges in Salt Lake or Bear River." Had he ever visited Salt Lake he would not have been puzzled over this stream which finds its way into Bear River a few miles above its mouth and therefore above the lake itself.

From Ogden's reference to the Americans on the south side of the lake it is evident that he knows that they have explored in that vicinity and that they know about the character of the country. In fact it appears that Ogden's men and groups of the Ashley-Smith company have been competing in the interior basin region since 1824, and it really does seem as though Ogden could have visited the lake earlier than this date though not earlier than 1825. Did he or his men approach the lake at an earlier date from the east by way of the river and valley upon which Ogden by some means or another has stamped his name? This cannot be proved by any conclusive evidence thus far available, but the oldest settlers in Ogden are grounded in the belief that he held rendezvous here and that his men trapped extensively in the streams running generally west from the Wasatch Mountains. The activities of his men are pretty well accounted for, however, during the years of 1825-1826-1827-1828-1829, and the rivalry between them and the Americans was rather intense.

As early as 1825 various circumstances reveal the proximity of the different groups, and the competition between them. In July of this year

14. See letter of Charles Middleton of Ogden concerning this matter. Quoted by T. C. Elliot in Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XI, p 250. Mr. Elliot himself in this connection says of Ogden: "There is little doubt as to his having been the earliest explorations of the regions around the westerly and northerly end of Great Salt Lake and as to the localities bearing his name." I myself have a number of letters from old settlers in Ogden reflecting with perfect assurance, this tradition.

Ogden, who is then somewhere in the upper Missouri country, sends a messenger¹⁵ to Spokane with the discouraging news that twenty-three of his men have deserted to the Americans in Cache Valley and carried with them, of course, their furs. From this point a Mr. Bimini carries the message to Fort Okanagan on the Columbia River where it is read by John Work who was then in charge of affairs at that point. These deserters may have remained in this vicinity to trap while Ogden, who accompanied them part way, turned north and east to the upper Missouri region. It is certain he was on the east branch of the Missouri on July 10, when he wrote the letter referred to in the foregoing account. Johnson Gardner, who made the bargain with the Ogden men and contributed to their faithlessness, was probably one of Ashley's free trappers, for he is later spoken of as such.

This incident illustrates the fact that both Hudson Bay Company men and Ashley men were in the vicinity of the Salt Lake drainage area, but apparently the Americans were a little in advance of the Ogden men who fell in with them to the profit of the former. In fact, Ogden did not leave the Flathead House on the Columbia until December 24, 1824, and the Ashley men were in the mountains and region east and north of Salt Lake all the fall.

If then priority of discovery belongs to the Ashley men, to which of them belongs the credit, and when was the discovery made?

15. Ashley gives the number of deserters as twenty-nine. See his personal narrative in Dale, p 156. The original journals of John Work containing Ogden's report are now in the possession of his descendants at Vancouver. John Work's journals were copied by Miss Agnes Lant in London, Hudson Bay Company House, in 1905. Edited by T. C. Elliot in Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XIII, 363 ff. These, however, cover his own expeditions in Snake River County, 1830-1831.

Again we find the problem difficult to solve. The honor has been claimed for two men and each one seemingly has a sound basis for his claim. These two are James Bridger and Etienne Provot.

To get at the basis of the contention it is necessary to go back to the early spring of 1824 and review the chapter of remarkable experiences of the Ashley men in this year which inaugurated a new era in the Western Fur Trade. It will be remembered that the Ashley men that spring separated into several self-supporting groups, who after the discovery of the South Pass, left the Yellowstone, Missouri, regions for activities beyond the mountains. Once again the Americans were entering into active competition with the British in the drainage basin of the Columbia, and by accident or design forestalling the British in the enterprises in the unknown or little known basin. In crossing over to the west of the divide they expected of course to trap in streams emptying into the Pacific. While the Columbia was well known, the
16
large river represented on the various maps of the period as flowing from a great lake westward to the ocean in the vicinity of San Francisco, was not known. However, they probably expected to find this river, which was variously named Buenaventura, Multonamah Rio S. Felipe. To Ashley it was the Buena-ventura, a tributary to the Multonamah (Williametta) which flowed into the Columbia.

Now the company led by Sublette in a search for this mythical stream and lured on no doubt by the hope of a rich fur region, left the Green River and crossed the divide striking Bear River which they followed down at first

16. Dale, pp 152-53. Personal Narrative of Ashley's in letter to General Henry Atkinson dated St. Louis, December 1, 1825.

no doubt harboring the illusion that they were on the Multnomah. Soon they found themselves going directly south and pursuing this course for some time they arrived in Willow or Cache Valley, Utah, where they decided to remain for the winter.

In the meantime, Etienne Provot and his free trappers by another route, were approaching the vicinity of Salt Lake, reasoning from all the circumstances it appears that in leaving the main body of Ashley's men somewhere in the upper stretches of Green River, they followed that stream down until coming to one of the large tributaries flowing east from its source in the Uintah Mountains. Just which one it is difficult to say, but perhaps Black's Fork, by following which he would readily pass to the source of Bear and Weber Rivers. The configuration here is peculiar. Bear and Weber Rivers have their sources in the angle of the Wasatch and Uintah Mountains and their tributaries are in such close proximity as to be almost entangled. Furthermore, Henry's Fork of Green River finds its origin in this juncture of the Wasatch and Uintah Mountains. Within a small radius of this watershed rivers flowing into the Pacific by way of the Columbia, into the Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico by way of the Missouri, into the Gulf of Lower California by way of the Green and Colorado and into the Interior Basin, have their source. Now if Etienne Provot, after following Black's Fork to its rise and striking the sources of Bear River, turned west, he would probably strike one of the tributaries of the Weber River. The probability is that this is the case because he certainly was acquainted with this river and its branches when Ashley met him in this region in the spring of 1825. Now had he follow the Weber down to Salt Lake in the Fall of 1824? If so he may have antedated Bridgers discovery by some weeks or months. To Bridger, however, whose claims,

will be considered a little later on, has usually and perhaps with justification been given the honor.

But there are facts and logical implications connected with Provot's claim, that are deserving of careful consideration. It is known that he did reach Great Salt Lake at the mouth of the Weber and that he wintered there in 1824-1825. Furthermore, it was here that seven of his men were killed by Indians, and not on Utah Lake as generally stated by historians who wrote of this period previous to Dale. He had his partisans too, who perpetuated the tradition. Chittenden seems to give him the honor in the following statement:

"There was one man, however, who did not reciprocate the General's expressions of good will. (Referring to Ashley's farewell to his men, 1826--the time when he sold out to Smith Sublette, and Jackson). This was Etienne Provot the Veteran mountaineer, who had first penetrated to the region of the Great Salt Lake." 19

A somewhat more explicit, though perhaps no more weighty testimony is that of W. Marshall Anderson, a friend and acquaintance and sometime companion of Provot, Louis Vasquez, Bridger and others. The testimony is in form of a letter written to the National Intelligencer and bearing the date, Seven Oaks, February 16, 1860. It is a protest against an article appearing in the Sacramento Standard under the caption, "Who discovered Salt Lake?" In the particular article, one Seth Grant, a Scotchman who had been in the wilds

17. Dale, Op.Cit. p. 107

18. Superintendent Indian Affairs. Letter Book, Kansas Historical Society, cited by Dale.

19. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p 28.

of America since 1819, and who had accompanied Bridger, Vasquez, and others in their mountaineering in 1826, accredits Colonel Vasquez, a Frenchman and a companion of Bridger, with the discovery of Salt Lake. In reply Anderson writes with apparent indignation as follows:

"Messrs. Editors of the National Intelligencer:

Allow me to call your attention to the above paragraph, credited to the Sacramento Standard. The writer on the authority of a Mr. Seth Grant, says that my old friend Vasquez, of the Rocky Mountains, was the discoverer of the Great Salt Lake of Utah. The honor could not possibly have been bestowed upon a worthier man. Can this geographical fact be now ascertained and settled beyond dispute? Was Colonel Vasquez the discoverer of that remarkable body of water? My answer is "no". I not only doubt, but I emphatically deny that statement. A little more than a quarter of a century ago, I heard the very subject of the priority of its discovery debated by old mountaineers almost in the vicinity of the lake itself. To furnish better proof than unassisted memory I send you the following extract from a letter written by me in 1837 at the request of the venerable Skinner, and published in the eighth volume of the American Turf Register:

"Here for a time, I will end my description of the animals of the boundless prairies and here too, I will end this hasty letter, after protesting, solemnly protesting, against an act of injustice done to a numerous brave and adventurous class of our western citizens by our much admired Irving, or by Captain Bonneville through him. In the name of Sublette, Fontinello, Déippes, Bridger, and Campbell. I protest against the name of Lake Bonneville, when it had been found, circumambulated, and trapped as early as 1820 by Provot. This lake was once called "Ashley", and with much more propriety, high and respected as is the name of Irving. 'Fiat Justitia'. The above was written at the time indicated from my journal notes, taken down in the presence of interlocutors in 1834. Provot was then no more." 20

This reflects persistent traditions concerning Provot, and seems to have the support of contemporaries who were actually connected with the affairs described. There are in it, however, various weaknesses which tend to discredit it. The letter quoted as having been written in 1837 reflects strong bias. The lauding of Captain Bonneville by Irving²¹ has aroused the ire of those hardy mountaineers who preceded Bonneville, and who no doubt deserve credit given to him. Then there are various inaccuracies in the letter showing that, despite the journal notes of 1834 referred to as a means of reenforcing memory. The facts are nevertheless given from memory and not from documentary evidence. For instance the writer places the date of the discovery of the lake by Provot as 1820. The fact of the matter is he did not enter the Fur Trade until 1822. Also he says Provot was then no more, 1834. Provot lived until 1850, and died in St. Louis in that year. Ashley, too, in the letters, is given credit for discovering the lake before Bridger. This we know to be untrue. The essential fact, however, that priority of discovery belongs to Provot may be true, but there is lacking strong corroborative evidence, either direct or indirect.

One word in regard to Seth Grant's claim that Colonel Vasquez was the discoverer. The case rests on this one single piece of evidence, and cannot, therefore, claim our serious attention. That is, neither primary nor secondary authorities speak of him in this connection; no

20. J. H. Simpson, Explorations Across the Great Basin of Utah, 1850.
pp 16-17.

21. Washington Irving's interesting volumes on Captain Bonneville's adventures in the Rocky Mountains, was first published in 1836, only a few months before this letter was written. The honors given to Bonneville at the expense of such mountaineers as Smith, Bridger, Provot, et.al. may have influenced Anderson in asserting so emphatically the claim of Provot, who certainly should have more claim to distinction as a pioneer in the Rockies than Bonneville.

tradition corroborates this single piece of evidence. Nor did he accompany Bridger on his trip down Bear River to the lake in the late fall of 1824.

A letter by Vasquez himself, dated St. Louis, December, 1824, disproves
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this.

The claim of James Bridger to the discovery seems at the present time to be supported by the strongest evidence of all. In the fall of 1824, the party led by Wm. L. Sublette were sheltered in the Cache Valley region on Bear River, a rather large and important stream. Curiosity led them to wonder as to its outlet. A settlement of the mooted question was arrived at in the good old western fashion of a wager. James Bridger, with characteristic daring and adventure, became the one to make the venture. Accordingly, in a small boat, he descended the stream until after passing through a canon from Cache Valley into Bear River Valley, he emerged in view of this remarkable lake. Not content with this view from a distance he pushed on down to the mouth of the river and tasted the brackish waters of this inland sea. He then returned to his companions with the solution of the problem they had been debating. His story of the salt waters induced the belief he had discovered an arm of the Pacific Ocean.

This is the bare outline of the story as it has been handed down to us by tradition and written record. Upon what evidence does it rest? The chief authority is one Robert Campbell, who was a member of the Smith-Sublette-Jackson Company, and who was with them in Salt Lake Valley in

22. Letter in Missouri Historical Society. Vasquez Mss. cited by Dale.

1826, arriving there just as the exploring party of four were returning from their trip around the lake. He remembers their report to the effect that the lake has no outlet. It seems that it was a matter of common knowledge among them that Bridger was the discoverer of the lake having visited it the late fall of 1824, as set forth in the foregoing. In 1857, G. K. Warren wrote to Campbell in St. Louis, for the facts concerning the discovery of the lake. Campbell replied under the date, St. Louis, April 4, 1857.²³ He introduces his communication by explaining that both James Bridger and Samuel Tullock were visiting with him when Mr. Warren's inquiry came and that to them the matter was again referred and the report rendered was confirmed by them. Says Campbell:

"I went to Willow or Cache Valley in the spring of 1826 and found the party just returned from their explorations of the lake and recollect their report that it was without outlet --- James Bridger was the first discoverer of Great Salt Lake."

In a subjoined postscript he then adds:

"A party of the Hudson Bay Company trappers came to the same place (Cache Valley) in the summer of 1825 and met the party that had discovered the lake that Season."

Before drawing final conclusions, we should weigh again the possible motives and bias of the witnesses. The witness of Etienne Provot was protestion strongly against honors given to Bonneville. He seemed to be a close partisan to Provot and in a disputed case as between him and someone like Bridger, he might decide in favor of the former. On the other

23. Warren's Memoir Report of Explorations and Survey for a Pacific Railroad West of the Mississippi. (Washington, 1861) Vol. XI, pp 35-36.

hand Robert Campbell was a partner in the company of Smith-Jackson-Sublette, successors to Wm. Henry Ashley. Provot disassociated himself from this group in 1826 and went into business in St. Louis. Campbell's leanings therefore might have been in the direction of his colleague in the company. His evidence, however, is more direct and close range and contains no inaccuracies in detail. The general harmony of the situation and the events seem to fit the story of Bridger's discovery.

A rather striking feature of the whole case is the simultaneity of circumstances and events. Within a very short period a number of people from slightly different angles came upon this so long unknown lake. Jedediah S. Smith comes in for recognition in this respect. Ashley in his personal narrative says of him "he fell on the waters of the grand lake, Buenaventura" (Great Salt Lake). This would place Smith's discovery between December 20, 1824, when in company with Ogden he left the Flathead House, and the following May when he joined Ashley's men in Cache Valley. Assuming then that either Bridger or Provot, or both, discovered the lake in the late fall or winter of 1824, or the early part of 1825, we would be forced to the conclusion that priority belongs to them. Perhaps Chittenden sums up the case about as conclusively as it can be stated. He says:

"The situation may be concisely stated by saying that while Bridger is the first white man we positively know to have seen Salt Lake, we do not know positively he was the first to see it." 24

24. Chittenden, American Fur Traders in the Far West, p 796.

With this statement of the case the controversy might appropriately close.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASHLEY MEN IN THE BASIN AFTER

1825.

The discovery of Salt Lake was a significant achievement in the Great Basin history. It furnished an interesting theme for speculation and study by scientists, as well as for trappers themselves. The immediate questions were "Is it an arm of the Pacific?" "Has it an outlet to the Pacific?" "What is its size?" "Are there streams running into it or out of it that offer inducements for trapping?" Curious and adventurous Americans generally work in the direction of their wondering, act in line with their curiosity, in short, puzzle out their own riddles. It was so in this case. The answer to these questions must be sought out by more adventurous explorations.

During the summer the different trapping parties plied their trade in the tributaries of Bear, Green, and Salt Rivers, but in the fall gathered in to rendezvous in Cache Valley. Wm. L. Sublette, who seems to be in command at this time, ordered his men to Salt Lake. Here at the mouth of the Weber, near the present site of Ogden City, they pitched camp for the winter. Here was a typical rendezvous turned into a pioneer village, as it were. As described above, there were, counting squaws and children, six hundred or more persons in the camp.

How they spent the winter will have to be imagined, for there are no particular details to enlighten us.

It appears, however, that during their sojourn here the foregoing questions were answered, the lake was surveyed sufficiently well to furnish some accurate geographical data concerning it. Four men in a boat made their

way around it, but found no outlet, although "they passed a place where they supposed it must have been." While Bonneville professed to doubt the truth of this purported exploration, it seems to be well authenticated. Robert Campbell found these men just returning when he arrived in Cache Valley in 1826.¹ Ashley gave similar information when he returned to St. Louis and the report was generally current after. Extracts from a news item in Niles Register December 9, 1826, reads as follows:

"The lake which terminated the expedition westwards is a most remarkable body of water, and heretofore unknown unless from vague accounts. It is estimated to be one hundred miles long and sixty or eighty wide. It was coasted last spring by a party of General Ashley's men, in canoes who were occupied four and twenty days in making its circuit. They did not exactly ascertain its outlet but passed a place where they suppose it must have been, the water of this lake is much saltier than that of the sea. Some of the salt obtained from this by boiling has been brought in by General Ashley --- he has also brought it some specimens of rock salt, found in strata several feet thick at the surface of the ground, with streams of water running through it in numerous little channels. The people in the mountains plentifully supply themselves with salt at this spot, and carry it home in bags."

Thus the lake was circumambulated at this early date and its size and character approximated rather closely; and thus, too, is initiated an industry, that of salt refining, that has grown to important proportions, and continues an industry of profit to those engaged in it.

These notable discoveries were paralleled by equally notable achievements in the enterprise of fur gathering. The various streams feeding Great

1. Warren's Memoir, op. cit.

Salt Lake, as well as the upper affluents of Green River, were fruitful of beaver, and the trappers were richly rewarded for their efforts. Not only were they successful in their own trapping enterprises, but they had succeeded in winning over twenty-three members of the Hudson Bay Company together with all their catch of furs. This questionable transaction was consummated by Johnson Gardner in behalf of the Ashley interests. Contrary to the intimations of Chittenden, neither Ashley nor Ogden was a direct party to the deal. Seven weeks after the event, Ogden wrote of the circumstances with evident regret. He was then on the headwaters of the Missouri. Nor was Ashley in the country at the time. When he did arrive some five or six weeks later, it seems he had no scruples in accepting the furs, and of course the rich profits going with them.

All in all the returns for this year were rich indeed, and Ashley commenced his homeward journey with his fortune practically assured. Although Bockwourth has some rather romantic tales to tell of the return trip, there was nothing of unusual moment occurred until he reached St. Louis, where a veritable ovation greeted him. Bockwourth says, "There were not less than a thousand persons present to hail our landing with shouts that deafened our ears."

Reports of his good fortune had preceded him, and this no doubt accounts largely for the greeting that met him at the landing. However, he

2. This is the number reported by John Work in his journal as quoted by T. C. Elliot in Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XI, p. 248. Ashley places the number at 29, letter to Gen. Atkinson, given in full by Dale. Dale, p. 156. Ogden, under date of April 9, 1826, says: "About 10 A. M. were surprised by they arrival of a party of Americans and twenty-eight of our deserters of last year." It was upon the basis of a letter received from Ogden July 26, 1825, that Work reported twenty-three.

3. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p. 277.

4. T. D. Bonner, Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, (C.G. Leland, Ed. 1892) p. 88.

deserved honor for other and more important reasons. His trip had been truly a remarkable one. Leaving St. Louis in November of the previous year, he had deviated from the usual route, and pursued a new pathway over which the Union Pacific Railroad was later to be built. Following the South Platte to and through what was later known as Bridger Pass, he crossed over to the North Platte and Sweetwater and thence up the Sweetwater and through the South Pass to the upper stretches of the Green River, in which vicinity he arranged for, and later held the first great rendezvous in the valleys of the mountains. By this means he had shortened the distance from St. Louis to Green River some five hundred miles and discovered a roadway over which thousands of emigrants were to travel later in great wagon caravans.

This route was made possible by the use of horses and mules. So long as the plains were penetrated by boats and portages the Platte offered an obstruction. It had been fitly described as a "thousand miles long, and ⁵ six inches deep". The basin which it drained, however, grew abundant grass and offered ease of access with wagon.

This exploit was performed in the late fall and winter of 1824-1825. As a climax to the journey the Green River was navigated to a point some fifty miles below the mouth of the Uintah. This hazardous accomplishment must be added to the daring ventures of Wm. Henry Ashley. Independent of his business success, though, he deserved the plaudits of the multitudes who greeted him at St. Louis on his arrival in October, 1825.

5. Dale, p. 116. Cf. Bradbury's Travels, in Thwaites Early Western Travels, Vol. V, p. 226, also Farnham, in Early Western Travels, Vol. XXVIII, p. 205.

Not yet satisfied, however, he sold his furs, and immediately began preparations for another expedition to the newly discovered fields the following spring. Accordingly, in March, 1826, he was again wending his way across the plains via the North Platte. A few months later he was in the vicinity of Salt Lake, where his trappers, hearing of his approach, had hastened to meet him. After a general good time together, Ashley sold out his interest in the business to three of his distinguished associates, Jedediah S. Smith, David E. Jackson, and Wm. L. Sublette, and retired. Although after this time he was indirectly connected with the company, and even with other companies, notably the American Fur Company, he made no more trips to the mountains. He left his name and impress, however, on the Inland Basin and his successors "carried on". Later, as representative to Congress from the State of Missouri, he was second only to Benton in championing everything western.

For a time Ashley's successors met with encouraging success. As an evidence of this, Smith and partners were able by October, 1827, to pay off their indebtedness to Ashley, who accompanied the supply train that summer to the frontier, and returned with 135 packs of furs. For some years after this he continued to be the supply agent for his former associates and others who had begun to rival them in the business.

But so far as Great Basin history is concerned, the activities of Jedediah S. Smith are of chief concern. It seems that the new company were seeking more "worlds to conquer". Not satisfied with the discoveries and profitable enterprises around Salt Lake and vicinity they determined upon finding still other fruitful fields. They deemed it altogether probable that there were beaver streams in the region westward lying between them and the Pacific. Little did they realize the barrenness and beaverless character

of the country they purposed to survey.

Not to hazard too much and not to leave a region that was proving so profitable in resources, they decided that the main body of trappers should remain and trap in the waters already yielding rich returns, while a small brigade should launch the new enterprise. Fortunately Smith, the best educated of the group and the one best fitted from every point of view, was chosen to lead the party.

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Smith was not only a man of undoubted courage, as has many times been shown, but he was a man of natural ability, a man of vision, a man who accepted difficult tasks as a challenge to resolute endeavor. In this projected enterprise he may have seen more than beaver streams; he may, as Dale suggests, also have projected schemes for shipping furs from some Pacific port, or he may have conceived the idea of a waterway via the Colorado to the sea. At any rate whatever the dangers, he was the one to brave them.

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Then, again, Smith already knew something of the country south of the Columbia, having talked with many trappers who had been for years in the Snake River region. It will be recalled that he had intimate connection with Alexander Ross and with the Hudson Bay people at the Flathead House. From them he had learned as much as he could about the country. Probably much that he heard about the region over the rim of the Basin was discouraging, but he was not the one to rest his case on the reports of others. Furthermore, he started in the direction of the most "unknown" to him, and about which he could get no information from the Indians.

6. See "Captain Jedediah S. Smith", by J.M. Guinn in Southern California Historical Society Publications, Vol.III, 1897. Cf. Eulogy by E.L. Sabin, in Kit Carson Days, 1914, appendix.

7. Dale, pp. 184-185.

On the 22nd of August, 1826, he with a party of fifteen men commenced his long journey. He tells briefly his own story of the⁸ expedition, the substance of which is as follows: Leaving Salt Lake on the date above named, he traveled southwest to Utah Lake, which he passed on its eastern shore, thence south until he struck Sevier river, which he mistakenly assumed emptied into what he calls "Little Utah Lake" --- the first time of which we have any record of the name being thus applied. His narrative is very sweeping and general. Details that might have been decidedly enlightening are omitted. It would appear, however, that he followed closely the route of the Denver and Rio Grand Railroad into San Pete County. He speaks of Sanpatch (San Pete) Indians on Ashley (Sevier) river. The location of these Indians is in Sanpete valley, and thus they give indications of route taken.

From this point, according to Dale and Chittenden, who reflect the traditional view, he suddenly transplants himself and party south more than a hundred miles to the Virgin river, which he names Adams river after the President of the United States. No description is given upon which to base any accurate calculation regarding the country over which he is moving so rapidly, but certain meager details regarding the mountains crossed and the direction of the river flow might lead to the conclusion that the Virgin river of today is not the one he traveled down for ten days or more before reaching the salt cave. In fact, some of⁹ the details are entirely contrary to such a view. Smith himself says:

8. Letter of Smith to General Wm. H. Clark, Supt. of Indian Affairs, dated Little Lake or Bear River, July 17, 1827. Letter given in full in Dale, pp. 186 ff.

9. Smith letter, op. cit.

"I pass over a range of mountains running southeast and northwest and struck a river running southwest which I called Adams river in compliment to the President. The water is of a muddy cast and is a little brackish." Then again "Here (about ten days march down it) the river runs to the southeast. On the southwest side of the river there is a cave --- the roof and sides and floor are solid rock salt, a sample of which I send you."

Now here is a clue: if Smith instead of going across the Escalante desert south to the Virgin, traveled southwest, he would strike Meadow Valley wash and continuing down southwest and South he would come to the present Muddy river, the name "Muddy" answering to his description. Now

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this runs southeast as he says and empties into the Virgin a few miles below the present settlement of St. Thomas near which is the famous salt cave. If then Smith followed this course, deviating slightly to visit the Salt cave, he could come to the Virgin just below the junction and probably not realize he was on a new stream. This route thus vaguely indicated is very nearly that of the present San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad. I am inclined to accept this view as against the

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older one.

10. Dale says, (Ashley-Smith Explorations, p. 188, footnote) The Virgin flows slightly to the west of south in its lower course. Smith's "southeast" is inexplicable.

11. This view of the case is supported by G. Hart Merriam in an article entitled "The Route of Jedediah S. Smith" published in the Quarterly of the California Historical Society, Vol. II, No. 3, San Francisco Oct. 1923. The article is accompanied by a line map, and seems to represent a careful piece of research. On the whole the conclusions reached are well sustained by evidence and personal observation of the country described. However, there are still some difficulties and uncertainties. I, myself, am rather familiar with this country having lived there many years. Now the one objection to the whole theory is that the Meadow Valley Wash and Muddy river are practically dry during a good part of each summer.

Now this cave is still intact and of interest to curiosity seekers. Moreover, the vicinity round about is described carefully, by Smith as also the Indians, the Pa Utches, who reside there. Two days more bring him to the Colorado, which he calls the Seedakeeder and which he follows down on the east side four days to the Mohave villages where he remains fiteen days to recruit.

The Indians here are industrious and agricultural; beans, pumpkins, water-melons, musk-melons, etc., are raised in abundance. After recuperating themselves and replenishing their supply of horses through purchase and exchange with the Indians, the members of the little party recrossed the river and commenced their journey across the barren southern desert westward to California.

Smith's experiences in California concern particularly the history of that State, and do not therefore come within the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that he was at first viewed with considerable suspicion and summoned before the governor at San Diego to make explanations. It was only after the intervention of Americans, notably Captain W. H. Cunningham of the ship Courier from Boston that he was given clearance papers, after which he and his men commenced their return journey. At first they went east on the path they had come, but once beyond the settlements they turned north and, keeping a line approximately one hundred miles from the shore, traveled near three hundred miles over new country to the valley of the Stanislaus. Here after various difficulties, he left the main party and with only two companions and an equipment of seven horses, two mules and such provisions for both the men and the animals as it was

possible to carry, struck boldly across the mountains, then covered with snow from four to eight feet deep, and from thence he went directly across
12
the barren desert region to Salt Lake.

The trip consumed twenty-eight days, and was one requiring great courage and endurance from the very beginning. The region traversed was entirely destitute of game or vegetation or anything with which to replenish the vanishing supplies of the weary travelers. In fact, long stretches of desert were so parched and dry that no drop of water could be found to quench the thirst of man or beast. Says Smith, "we frequently went two days without water." Upon arrival at the lake one horse and one mule were left of the nine with which they started. The others had been used for food as fast as they became useless for travel.

This trip from Salt Lake and back, almost completely around and through the heart of the Basin, was a remarkable exploit. The route traveled marked both a Southern and a central roadway. As before suggested the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad follows a good portion of the way of this Southern route. Ashley had previously plotted the route later followed by the Union Pacific to Ogden, Utah, and now Smith explored the remaining distance to the coast. The Western and Central Pacific lines follow somewhat closely the central or return route.

But he had left the main party back in the mountains, and, after a
13
hasty journey to the rendezvous on Bear Lake, where he met his partners

12. Chittenden, (American Fur Trade, p. 284) says he probably crossed the range near Sonora Pass, going north of Mona Lake and south of Walker Lake. Cf. "Jedediah Smith Crosses the Sierras" by C. Hart Merriam in Sierra Bulletin Vol. X, pp. 376-378 for a different and perhaps the correct view.

13. For some reason not explained the rendezvous had been moved from Salt Lake to Bear Lake since Smith left the previous summer.

Jackson and Sublette and reported to them the results of his journey, he made immediate preparations to return. Accordingly on July 13, he once more set out with nineteen men over the same long trail. Upon reaching the Muchaba (Mohave) villages, he again stopped a few days to recruit. The Indians as usual appeared friendly and at no time gave any indication of the fiendish deed they were about to commit. All unsuspectingly, then, Smith and his men, after trading for certain supplies of beans, potatoes, etc., commenced to row across the river on rafts, only part of the men going at a time. While thus separated, the Indians fell on them and massacred ten and took two women prisoners, and captured or destroyed all their property. Thus diminished in numbers and divested of all their goods, they pushed on over dreary wastes to San Gabriel, making the journey in nine and a half days. Here two of the men were left, Thomas Virgin, who was seriously wounded, and Isaach Gailbraith. With the remaining seven he hurried on to join the long waiting party in the North. Destitute, himself, and without supplies for relief, he could bring but little cheer to his impoverished companions.

Shortage of provisions, however, was not the only trouble that presented itself. At least others soon developed. To relieve the situation one recourse alone seemed open. Once again the hospitality of the Californians must be tested. Smith therefore proceeded to St. Joseph to see what could be done towards replenishing the exhausted supplies and getting permission to move through the province. Upon making known

14. Besides the 19 men there were two Indian women in the company.

15. It is quite likely Virgin River was named after this man who was wounded in the massacre.

16. Reference to this massacre may be found in "Brief Sketch of Accidents, Misfortunes and Depredations Committed by Indians on the firm of Smith, Jackson, and Sublette, since July 1st, 1826, to the present, 1829".

the situation of his party and their needs, he immediately became the victim of suspicion, and was thrown into a miserable hovel called a guard house and given to understand he was to be tried as an intruder.

After ten or twelve days of uncertainty at St. Joseph, he was ordered to Monterey where he was finally permitted to see the governor. Still fate seemed to be against him. He was even threatened with deportation to Mexico for trial. Finally, through the help of one Captain Cooper from Boston, and three other American masters of vessels who interceded in his behalf, he was permitted, upon signing a \$30,000.00 bond to purchase supplies and equip himself for his expedition out of the country.

His experiences the next year belong more properly to the history of California and Oregon than to this narrative. The story of the tragic massacre of all his men, (he left San Francisco with twenty-one. Two returned later, leaving nineteen to continue the journey) save three, on the banks of the Umpqua has been often and vividly told. ¹⁷ The kind treatment the three survivors received from Dr. McLoughlin upon their arrival at Vancouver is also a matter of common record. But the sum total of his achievements in connection with Great Basin history needs appraisal.

He is one of the three who first discovered Salt Lake in the fall and winter of 1824-1825. In his explorations after the discovery, he virtually circumambulated the Basin, and thrust a pathway through it directly from California eastward. He became perfectly familiar with

16. (Cont.) Mss. Kansas Historical Society. Cf. J.J. Warner, Reminiscences of Early California, Annual Publications, Vol. VII, 1907-1908.

17. An early account is found in Hines History of Oregon, N.Y., 1859, pp. 110-111. This account is based upon information received from Dr. McLoughlin at Vancouver when Mr. Hines and his missionary associates visited there, 1837.

the region around and north of Salt Lake to and beyond the northern rim of the basin. He furnished valuable geographical information upon which one of the best of the early maps was based.¹⁸ His superb example of courage and Christian devotion to noble principle was a stimulus to high resolve and faithful service on the part of his associates. His bearing and gentlemanly dignity were a credit to his country and his fellow countrymen whom he represented in delicate relations with America's rivals. In this connection his experiences with the Spanish or Mexicans and the English are notable examples. Even in the rather questionable affair of the Iroquois in which he secured some of the Hudson Bay Company's furs, he was at once recognized as a leader and a man of ability. In California, although subjected to indignities and inconvenience, he gave good account of himself and won respect from his annoyers. The venerable John McLoughlin received him with utmost good will and did a generous part in securing from the Umpqua Indians his stolen furs and then purchasing them at a remunerative price. Living in sympathetic and friendly association with the uncouth and in some cases almost unsocialized if not uncivilized mountaineer, he was also at ease among the educated and elite.¹⁹ His cruel death on the Cimarron, 1831, at the hands of the race he had so many times escaped, was an almost tragic loss to his relatives, his friends and his country. All writers who speak of Smith in any relation pay him high tribute, of which the following is a type: if there is any merit in untiring perseverance and terrible suffering in the prosecution of trade, in search-

18. Gallatin's map accompanying his Synopsis of the Indian Tribes of North America, 1837. Gallatin attributes his map to information received from Ashley and Smith, and deprecates the fact that circumstances have prevented Ashley from sending further detailed descriptions which were promised, pp. 140-141. This information was given out one year before Bonnevill's map. For a careful consideration of this question see Chittenden, pp. 307-430.

19. See description of an interview had with him at St. Louis, 1830.

ing out new channels of commerce, in tracing out the courses of unknown rivers, in discovering the resources of unknown regions, in delineating the characters, situations, numbers and habits of unknown nations, Smith's name must be enrolled with those of Franklin and Parry, of Clapperton and
20
Park.

After the perilous and eventful journey just described he made no further explorations in the Basin region. August 4, 1830 he and associates sold out to Fitzpatrick, Milton Sublette, Jim Bridger and others and went to St. Louis. The next summer while accompanying a wagon caravan
21
of merchandise to Santa Fe, he was murdered as indicated above. He will therefore figure no more in these pages.

But before leaving him it may be well to emphasize again the international rivalry which his relations with the Spanish and English illustrate. In California it was particularly evident that the Mexican authorities were jealous of American intruders, and determined to keep them out of the country. The Great Basin too, belonged to Mexico, but being unoccupied and undefended it was open to daring adventurers. However, Smith learned at California that his misfortunes and serious loss of life at the Mojave villages in 1827 were a result of instruction from Mexican authorities to the Indians not to let any strangers pass.

With the English, too, the same rivalry is manifest. While receiving from the veteran Dr. John McLoughlin, Factor of the Hudson Bay Co., the most generous treatment, there was an understanding effected whereby Smith and associates were to leave the region north of 42 degrees to the

19. (cont.) J. J. Warner, "Reminiscences of Early California", Southern California Historical Society Publications, Vol. VII, p. 176.

20. See Eulogy in Sabin, Kit Carson Days, p. 515; also Victor, Rivers of the West, p. 79.

21. J. Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, and J. J. Warner, Reminiscences of Early California, are valuable authorities.

great English Company. Indeed McLoughlin could afford to be generous for this region was pretty well monopolized by the English anyway. This is not said in detracton to the least degree of Dr. McLoughlin's Christian motives or honorable impulses. While loyal to his company and British interests, he was a high type of Christian character.

During the four years' existence of the Rocky Mountain Fur Co. 1830-1834, its members scattered their efforts over a wide area and came into intense competition with various other companies, new and old. While some of them at various times were back in the basin region, particularly in the region of Ogden's Hole, they made no further discoveries of note. The fruitful period for business and for geographical knowledge was from 1824-1830. It was in this brief span that the Great Salt Lake and the streams running into it were discovered and explored, the roads to California southwest and west across the Salt Lake and Nevada desert and over the Sierras opened up, and the topography of the region in general pretty well ascertained. The names of various streams and lakes are mute testimonies of those early explorers and their work. Mute testimonies? Yes, for too often the people of today know nothing of how these names came to be or what stories they tell of past achievements. Some of them are, Smith's Fork and Tullock's Fork of Bear River, Cache Valley, Ogden River, Ogden City, Utah Lake, Provo River, Ashley Creek, Virgin River, Mary's River, etc. etc. These names should be made to speak more eloquently of the pathfinders in whose honor they have been christened.

CHAPTER VI

PETER SKEENE OGDEN

AND

BRITISH FUR TRADERS IN THE GREAT BASIN

More than cursory notice has already been given in this narrative to the contact of British and American trappers in the Great Basin region. Indeed, their interests were so entwined, and their competitive activities so interlocked that a treatment of either group necessarily involved a discussion of the other. It seems appropriate, however, at this point to summarize British expeditions and evaluate results.

While the Americans were probably the first to cross the divide and enter the Basin from the north in 1812, no important results followed until a decade later. In the meantime the British Northwest Company acquired a virtual monopoly over the whole Columbia River drainage area, and began to pass southward over the divide. In fact, it appeared at one time that the British might absorb the whole of California region as against either Spain or America. The war of 1812 and the surrender of Astoria as an incidental result, greatly strengthened the British grip and for ten years no Americans were to be found west of the Rockies. The British power and influence were still further accentuated by the union of the Northwest and Hudson Bay Companies in 1821. Even the Anglo-American agreement of 1818, securing to the Americans equality of privilege in the Oregon country south of 49 degrees, was a theoretical affair so long as the Hudson Bay Company maintained its firm hold under the clever though venerable John McLoughlin. This was true at least until after the discovery of the South Pass through which the Americans passed in ever-increasing numbers until the region was won as a permanent possession, of the United States.

But the British were doughty and persistent competitors and eager explorers. As has been previously noted the Northwest Company, under the new plan of sending out detached groups or self supporting brigades to new and more or less remote fields, had succeeded in crossing the dividing ridge between the Columbia River Basin and the interior region and had thus discovered Bear River and followed it down at least as far as Bear Lake. This was probably the farthest point south reached by white men until the Ashley parties made their notable discoveries.

But when these latter began extending their enterprises in the upper Green River country, and over the divide in the direction of the Great Salt Lake, they soon came into contact with the British fur traders under command of Peter Skeene Ogden who, in the late fall of 1824, had succeeded Alexander Ross as leader of the famous Snake River expeditions. For six successive years following, that is, from 1824-1830, Ogden and his men were exploiting this more southern district and launching ventures that resulted in actual new discovery and exploration. It is with these in particular that this chapter purposes to deal.

Peter Skeene Ogden was of rather distinguished ancestry. His father was an eminent union Empire Loyalist and judge advocate in Quebec, where Peter was born 1794. His mother was of an aristocratic family of Livingston Manor, near New York City. Early in the Revolutionary Period the family moved into the British province of Quebec where they assumed high place in the legal profession. Peter himself was educated for the law, but very early in life showed his adventurous spirit. In 1811 at the age of 17 he becomes clerk in the Northwest Co. Previous to this, apparently in very early boyhood, he had been for a short time in the employ of the great nestor of American fur traders, John Jacob Astor, who recruited members for his company

from Montreal. Apparently, however, the Ogden family favored the English company to which Peter became permanently attached. In fact, in 1830 he became a partner in this famous organization.

That his services and loyalty justified his admission into the company as a partner is evidenced by various incidents in which he figured prominently. It seems that from 1811 to 1818 he was at Fort Isle a la Crosse, a small island in Lake Athabasca. Both the powerful Hudson Bay Company and its formidable rival the Northwest Company, had a fort on this island. The rivalry between the two became intense, and violent conflicts between the respective members ensued. In these Ogden took a prominent, and it is said, lawless part. In fact, in one brawl two Hudson Bay men were killed, and suspicions pointed clearly at Ogden, against whom charges were preferred. This was in 1817, and a year later, that is, in 1818, he appears at Astoria in the vicinity of which fort he seems to have served until 1821, when occurred the merger of the rival companies under the Hudson Bay name.

This furnished the opportunity for Ogden to go to London to see his father who had gone there to live out, in the heart of civilization, his declining years. The father died in 1823, leaving Peter one-eighth of the family estate. City life, however, did not appeal to the adventurous spirit of Peter Skeene Ogden, who on July 23, 1823, is found at the York factory on the Hudson, ready to take charge of an express to Columbia. Seemingly now he is in full fellowship with the Hudson Bay Company, for in 1824 he is given commission to command the Snake River expeditions inaugurated by McKenzie and Ross.

1. My authorities for these data on Ogden are, T.C. Elliot, "Peter Skeene Ogden, Fur Trader" in Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XI, pp 229-278, and Ross Cox, Adventures on the Columbia River, Vol. II, 226-234. Charles Wilkes, Narrative of the U.S. Exploring Expedition 1838-1841, and Agnes Lant, The Conquest of the Great Northwest, chap. 31, pp 246 ff. Miss Lant has quite a

Ross is now left in charge of affairs at the Flathead house and Ogden is given full command of the active field work. Accordingly, December 20, 1824, in the dead of winter, he starts out to try his fortune in new fields of adventure. It is quite probable that Jedediah S. Smith and party, whose wanderings and exploits have previously been rehearsed, accompanied him, at least part way on his journey. Thus it will be seen at the very beginning of this activities in this region is face to face with the rivalry of the Americans.

The journals for this season of 1824-25 are not available, so details of his travels are lacking. From other sources, however, fairly accurate information may be gleaned concerning him. It appears that he accompanied the party south as far as the rim of the Basin or perhaps over it to the Bear River Valley; then, being anxious to visit the head waters of the Missouri, he divided the company, taking one division with himself, and leaving the other to try new fields. At any rate in May, 1825, some twenty-nine of his men, as has been previously related, went over to the Ashley Company, taking with them all their furs. This was in the vicinity of Salt Lake, probably on the Weber. Johnson Gardner, who consummated this rather high-handed deal, later appeared in the role of one of Ashley's free trappers.

This rather notorious incident is mentioned by various writer and furnished a key to considerable information. Certain it is that Ogden himself was not in the vicinity of Salt Lake this season, and of course was

1. (Cont.) different account of Ogden's early life, from the one here given. T. C. Elliot's story, the one followed here, is supported by evidence and seems, in its essential details, to be unassailable.
2. John Work in his journal records this matter from information received by letter from Ogden. Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XI, p. 248.

3

not a party to the unscrupulous deal as intimated by Chittenden. Seven weeks after the transaction he writes from the headwaters of the Missouri rehearsing the circumstances of the event, and John Work, who receives the letter at Okanagan, records it in his journal. M. J. Wyeth also gives an account of it, and Ogden himself in his journal entry of April 9, 1826.

From information gained through these various sources it may be deduced that such discoveries as were made by Ogden party this season were supplemental to or concurrent with those made by the Ashley groups. But the conflicting interests of the British and Americans are constantly manifest.

While the exploits of this season were not of great importance when measured in terms of actual discovery of new territory, the next four expeditions covered regions hitherto unexplored and added much to the contributions made by Jedediah S. Smith and other Ashley men. During all these five years the two groups are in close proximity and in constant competition with one another. In this connection it is interesting to note some of Ogden's comments. March 20, 1826, he writes:

7

"I sent two men with boats to examine Raft River. About thirty (sic) Indians paid us a visit. They report that a party of Americans and Iroquois are not three days march from us; near the spot where one of my party was killed last spring. If this be the case, I have no doubt our hunts are damned, and we may prepare to return empty handed. With my discontented party I dread meeting the Americans. That some will attempt desertion I have not the least doubt.

3. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, Vol. I, p. 277.

4. John Work, op. cit. loc. cit.

5. F. G. Young, Sources of the History of Oregon, Vol. 1, p. 73.

6. The Ogden Journals for this year are published in Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. X, 1909. The Journals after 1826 until 1829 are published in the Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XI, 1910.

7. A river south of the Snake.

Again on April 9.

"About 10 A. M. we were surprised by the arrival of a party of Americans, and some of our deserters of last year, 28 in all.⁸ If we were surprised, they were more so from an idea that the threats of last year would have prevented us from returning to this quarter, but they find themselves mistaken. They camped a short distance away; all quiet.

The following day, Ogden relates in his journal the circumstances of his settlement with the deserters, who it appears, were rather heavily indebted to the Hudson Bay Co. He receives, so he declares, all the beaver they had, amounting in all to 21.12 beavers, evidently meaning 21 L 12 shillings, or about \$400 worth. This interpretation agrees with the facts as given by Mr. T. C. Elliot and seems to be the only consistent one with the later enumeration of totals of beaver skin given by McLoughlin.¹⁰ Agnes Lant, however, gives a different and very extravagant view.¹¹ She exalts Ogden's cleverness in out-yankeeizing the Americans and securing from them 8172 beaver. She seems to overlook the fact that although the Ogden trappers were unusually successful this year, exceeding the fondest expectation of Ogden, who regarded an accumulation of three thousand as a very encouraging number to secure in one season, the total number reported upon arrival at Vancouver in August, including those added by the deal with the Americans, was less than half the number she gives as secured from the Americans alone.¹² The actual total was 3577. This is only an instance of Miss Lant's rather extravagant method of popularizing Ogden. In describing the difficulties of crossing the Nevada desert she speaks of horses sinking in the soft sand up to the saddle girths.¹³ She however, gives valuable and substantial information in her chapter on Ogden.

8. The number given by John Work was twenty-three. Ashley gives twenty-nine, which number is probably correct. Dale, Ashley Narrative, p. 156. Cf. note 12, Chapter IV, "Discovery of Salt Lake."

9. Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. X, p. 360

10. Letter of John McLoughlin to John McLeod now in the Dominion archives at Ottawa, Canada.

All in all it is seen by the foregoing account, that, without juggling figures, this season was a very profitable one for the Ogden trappers. Encouraged by these results and bent on discovering still richer fields if possible, Ogden was soon off on his third Snake River Expedition which lasted from September 1826 to August 1827. This time he conducted his enterprise in southern and southwestern Oregon and California, trapping Klamath River region and eventually going as far south as Shasta River or the upper stretches of the Sacramento. Shasta was probably named after the Indians there.

After varied experiences this year, some of them extremely discouraging and threatening, the expedition meandered back over new country. Knowing that the Snake River was somewhere northeast, the return route was in that direction over the northwest corner of Nevada, a desolate barren waste called the Desert of Death. The party suffered terribly at times on this desert, and even Ogden himself became almost disheartened. With true pioneer spirit however, he declared that to cross such deserts was indeed a critical undertaking, but the region "must be explored sometime". But provisions became scarce, and water still more scarce. Finally after suffering from the pangs of hunger and thirst, and uncertainty as to the outcome of it all, the party reached the headwaters of Malheur River. They were all now in familiar country again, and in another month were safely back at Vancouver. This year then witnessed pioneer explorations in parts of southern Oregon, northwestern Nevada and northern California. Over part of the route at least, the later California trail passed.

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"Ogden had vowed", so says Agnes Lant, "he would not be doomed to

11. Lant, op. cit. pp. 278-279.

12. McLoughlin, loc. cit.

13. Lant, op. cit. p. 296.

14. Lant, op, cit. p. 289.

cruise in the wilderness another year." Be that as it may he conducted still more important expeditions into the Great Basin during the three years following. In fact, he was yet to make important discoveries and explorations and leave his name indelibly stamped upon this country.

Little did he rest during any of these years. Reaching Vancouver in July, he recruited for his fourth Snake River expedition, and started out again with his little band on the 24th of August. Eleven months later, July 22, 1828, he was once more back to his headquarters. He thus records his return.

"Tuesday 22nd July. Brigade arrived safe.
Mr. McKay's party will join us at Ft. Vancouver. So ends my fourth trip to the Snake country and I have to regret the loss of lives.
The returns far exceed my expectations."

This brief generalization indicates a prosperous year, and various details recorded from time to time confirm the report. In spite of the rivalry of the Americans of whom he speaks on numerous occasions, the catch of beaver is flattering. It is interesting, though, to note his fears as he learns that Americans working in the direction of McKay who is leading a group in the vicinity of the Sandwich Island River (Owyhee River). Almost disconsolately he exclaims "My sanguine hopes of beaver here are blasted." Again on October 5, "Reached Reed's River (the Boise). I have little hope as the Americans are everywhere." And on November 2, he reveals his clever dealing thus: "It is my intent to amuse the Americans now with us so that McKay's men may have time to trap the beaver where the Americans purpose going."

These quotations from the Journal are given to show how intense the competition between the British and the Americans. This rivalry continued

during the whole season, each party trying to get some advantage of the other.

Their interrelations reveal interesting facts concerning the bases of operations, the winter encampments, etc. It seems the Americans had their¹⁵ post at Salt Lake this year and some Americans lodged with Ogden on the Snake River or Portneuf branch of it, were desperately anxious to reach it. The efforts of Samuel Tollock are particularly interesting in this regard. Ogden makes frequent reference to him and his fellow Americans. It was dead of winter, snow was deep and snow shoes were indispensable to any extended trip over these northern regions. Ogden saw to it that they were not supplied. January 16, he writes:

"The Americans are anxious to procure snow-shoes and I am equally so they should not. as I am of opinion they are anxious to bring to this quarter a party of trappers. I have given orders to all not to make any for the Americans. This day they offered \$25.00 for one pair, \$20.00 for another."

Finally Tullock and a companion decide to make their own snow shoes and start out on their perilous trip, and Ogden laughingly wonders why they did not think of this before. They had tried before to get through the snow without snow shoes, but failed, and now they failed with snow shoes; for on January 28, Ogden is happy to report their return again to camp. Furthermore he felicitates himself on preventing his Indians or any of his party from being bribed to assist, either as guides or in the sale of snow shoes. He thinks Tullock does not suspect this, but his is not the case as the latter well knows whose powerful influence was being used against him.

15. This post has been variously located by historians. T. C. Elliot suggests Utah Lake or Sevier Lake, Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol. XI, p. 365. Chittenden, Utah Lake American Fur Trade, Vol. I, p. 279. A fort was built on the shores of Salt Lake, probably by Ashley's men and a four pound cannon was sent in 1827. See letter of W. H. Ashley to General A. Macomb, Washington, March, 1820, in U. S. Senate Executive Documents, 21st Congress, 2nd session, Vol. I, No. 39.

A little later, Tullock and Robert Campbell who had now joined them started northward with a party, leaving their Salt Lake partners to take care of themselves and their interests in that section. It is evident from all this that Salt Lake is becoming a well established rendezvous or post, and that the British are pressing southward wherever their interests seem to carry them and the Americans are going north, Ogden fears, clear to Kootenay.

Although Tullock and Campbell take with them a well equipped company northward, various Americans linger near the Ogden camp, and more keep coming from various quarters. In the latter part of March two Americans from Salt Lake arrive to help their companions over the mountains. They are surprised to find most of them gone as described above. Ogden makes no further advance into the Basin this year, but in May begins his journey back to Fort Vancouver, where he arrives July 22nd.

The fifth and last Snake River expedition of which we have any detailed account takes Ogden far afield and results in the exploration of large areas of the Great Basin hitherto unknown. The Americans connected with Ashley and his successors had been all around the east and south side of Salt Lake and had become perfectly familiar with the whole Bear River region as well as the Weber and Ogden Rivers area. Ogden's men, too, among them the twenty-nine(?) deserters, had mingled with the Americans in this vicinity as early as the spring of 1825. But the region north and west of Salt Lake to the Sierra Nevada range had never been explored. To be sure, Ogden had skirted the northwest corner of Nevada over the so-called Desert of Death, but a vast area between was still terra incognite. To make this known was the achievement of Ogden

this year, 1828-1829.

Leaving Walla Walla in September, he led his party over the old familiar route via Powder River, Burnet River, Malheur, up Snake to Owyhee, trapping all the while, some of his men going up one stream and some another. The divide was crossed and waters running towards the south were reached by Ogden himself, who describes several lakes infiltrated with salt, and also speaks of rivers with which he is not familiar. The distinctive discovery, however, is the large river he calls Unknown River, but which his men called later, Ogden River or Mary's River, and which Fremont named the Humboldt. Certainly if any part of the Basin country should be named after Ogden this River should, but for some unknown reason Fremont gave it the official stamp of Humboldt.

This river proved a veritable paradise for beaver, but as the severe winter approached, and provisions were scarce, the company had to move on or starve. A sick man, John Paul, hampered their travel somewhat, but stress of circumstances compelled them to haste, so he was left with men to take care of him, and in a few days died and was buried on the banks of the Unknown River. The main company pressed on eastward in direction of Salt Lake, and on December 23, the journal records:

"Here we are at the end of Great Salt Lake, having this season explored one half of the north side of it and can safely assert as the Americans have of the south side that it is a barren country, destitute of everything."

From this it would appear that the arrival at Salt Lake on the 29th of December was only an incident in the survey of the region round about the lake, and Agnes Laut asserts as much when she says, "Ogden now (some time in the previous October) swung round four days march southwest and explored the entire surroundings of Salt Lake." This assertion is

necessarily based on the assumption that Ogden in October continued up Snake River to the Portneuf and from thence swung around to Salt Lake as indicated. But the journal record from day to day (there is a break from Oct. 17-26) does not lead to any such conclusion. On the contrary the entry on October 17, declares he, Ogden, intends going to Sandwich Islands River (Owyhee River). Nine days later, October 26, his record indicates he is south of the divide on waters running south, on lakes west of the Humboldt which he is soon to discover. Agnes Laut says¹⁷ he went west from Salt Lake to the Humboldt. but the details of the journal are all against it. If he followed his resolution of October 17, he would soon reach the Owyhee River, and by following up one of its western affluents, would reach the divide, and, crossing over, would penetrate the district of the lakes west of the Humboldt. Then going east and southeast he would reach this, the most important river in the western basin. This is probably what he did; for certainly in December he went eastward and skirted the northwest shore of Salt Lake.

Laut, again, seems to draw extravagant conclusions: she has him stay in Salt Lake all winter. This however, is inaccurate. He was most of the winter around Portneuf and the upper reaches of Bear River's southward course.

In March preparations are made for the spring hunt and the company is again on the move. March 29, "in view of Salt Lake." March 30, "arrived at point of encampment of December 23, when on the way eastward to Salt Lake." Here again Ogden and his men get a good view of the Salt Lake. Retracing their steps of the previous fall and winter, they are soon in the vicinity of the Humboldt and the south branches of the Snake.

17. Laut, op. cit. loc. cit.

On April 13 Ogden gives an item of interest and value in determining the route of the previous October. With part of his men he determines to cross over the divide from Humboldt to the Owyhee River, which he says is four days journey. Sandwich Island River (Owyhee) proving a disappointment to him, he writes May 2, "I must retrace our way to Unknown River." These details harmonize well with the conclusion that he followed this route into the Humboldt valley region when entering it the fall of 1828, and they are inconsistent with the assertion that he swung around the northwest border of Salt Lake and thence westward. But this is a mere matter of accuracy of detail. The larger fact remains that between September 22, 1828, and July 5, 1829, the whole northern half of the Great Basin, the part north of the route traveled by Smith in 1827 from west to east, west of Salt Lake was explored and rather accurately described. In his meanderings he had wandered over a large portion of Nevada, parts of Utah and Idaho, and southern Oregon. A good deal of his trapping was far south of the line 42 degrees north, and his richest returns were from the newly discovered Humboldt. Dale is hardly accurate when he says.

"For the most part, however, they operated north of the forty-second parallel, leaving the task of discovery and exploration south of that line to American trappers and traders chief among whom were William H. Ashley and Jedediah S. Smith." 18

The credit for the discovery and survey of the whole area of the basin north of Smith's central route to Salt Lake from California in 1827 belongs to Ogden.

But this is not all. It will be surprising to some, no doubt, to learn that Ogden, the following year, 1829-1830 seems to have gone south

18. Dale, foot-note, p. 51.

clear to the Gulf of California. While we have no Ogden journal giving detailed account of this extreme British penetration south, enough evidence has come to light to justify such a conclusion. Archibald McDonald, writing from Fort Langley to Edward Ermatinger March 1830 remarks that he (i.e. Rancis Ermatinger) and Ogden are far to the south, and Ogden writing John McLeod from Vancouver says: "I was not so successful in my last years trapping as the year preceding although I extended my trails by far greater distance to the Gulph (sic) of California." 19

This letter represents all of the definitely authenticated data concerning this California expedition, but T. C. Elliot thinks Chapter I of Traits of Indian Character is a general account of it. After reading this little book carefully, some of it several times, I am convinced that Mr. Elliot's position is exceedingly well sustained. To one who is acquainted with the setting of events in this period, it seems to me that there is but one conclusion to be reached, and that is that the little book "Traits of Indian Character" was certainly inspired by Ogden though written by someone else from information he supplied. 20

Then too, the arrowsmith maps projecting geographical data received from Ogden confirm the essential facts of the story of the tour through California and indicate the route east of the Sierras. In using the term California, it must be remembered that it included the whole Basin region south of the parallel 42 degrees north.

While it is true as indicated that the circumstances here related constitute all the positive and direct evidence of this farflung expedition, there is strong presumptive evidence supporting such a conclusion. It is proved beyond question that Ogden was in the San Joaquin

19. Oregon Historical Quarterly. Vol. XI, p. 251.

20. Traits of American Indian Life and Character, by a Fur Trader. London, Smith Elder & Co, 65 Cornhill. Bombay, Smith Taylor & Co. 1853. (Vol. XI, p. 269.

valley in California in the summer of 1830. Here Ewing Young and a party of trappers of whom Kit Carson was a member, met him and his Hudson Bay²¹ trappers. They were then on their way back to Talla Talla. The two parties trapped together for some time and then Ogden resumed his journey.

From the Arrowsmith maps, issued between 1832 and 1840, and produced largely from information furnished by the Hudson Bay Co. House in London, and further from implications easily drawn from the foregoing facts, it appears the Ogden party, on their southward journey, traveled east of the Sierra Nevada mountains and returned west of them, trapping in the coast rivers on the way.

Accepting and linking together those various facts and indications²² the conclusions come with compelling force that Ogden and his thirty men traveled clear through this region to the mouth of the Colorado. From his description (in "Traits") of the dreary desert region and the long days of suffering from thirst---three days without water---aportion of the sojourn must have been over the parched southern Mohave desert or Death Valley. This is interesting as indicating the persistency and scope of British activity particularly the great Hudson Bay company. Had the Americans been apathetic or indifferent --- indeed many of them were --- and had it not been for the restless, intrepid, American trapper seeking albeit, selfish

20. (Cont.) Elliot, Oregon Historical Quarterly discusses the connection between this little book and Ogden. See also appendix to 3rd edition of History of Northern Interior of British Columbia by Father Morice. London, 1906.

21. Peters, De Witt Clinton. The Life and Adventures of Kit Carson, the Nestor of the Rocky Mountains (N.Y. 1859) p. 37. Other references support this plain statement of fact.

22. The number given in Traits of American Indian Life and Character, by a fur Trader. Chapter I, "Indian Character."

23. See comment of J.M. Guinn on Danger of California Falling into Hands of England or France if United States did not establish a claim. Historical Society of Southern California, Vol. XXX, Chapter "The Capture of Monterey", Oct. 19, 1842, p. 70.

ends, it may be conjectured that in the declining power of Spain and the weakness of Mexico, Britain may have acquired not only Oregon but all California.²³ At any rate it seems fortunate that American wayfarers left the haunts of civilization, hunted out the mountain passes and accessible highways, entered into vigorous competition with their doughty rivals, and eventually laid open the pathway to American occupation and settlement.

But the work of Ogden should not be minimized. Under his leadership large portions of Utah, Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada were explored, and his name permanently planted on the map. In this regard, however, justice has been diverted. It is difficult to tell why the river valley and city east of Salt Lake bear his name. From all known facts his pioneering expeditions were in the Bear River valley on the north of Salt Lake and on its western shores. But it does seem certain that tradition accredits him with having held rendezvous in Ogden Hole and with having trapped in the adjacent streams.²⁴ The earliest Mormon settlers there found his name already fixed as described. How came it? On the other hand, it is a well established fact that he discovered Humboldt River which at one time bore his name. Why did Fremont change it? Some of these questions give rise to puzzling speculations. Recovery of the lost journals and the filling in of the gaps in materials at hand may throw more light on the whole matter.

After 1830, Ogden led no more expeditions south, but was sent north to open up the British Columbia trade and overcome the competitive activity of the Russians. Later, however, he returned to Oregon where he died in 1854. Of his death and burial, Elliot has this to say:

24. Edwin Bryant, What I Saw in California in the Years 1846-1847. (Philadelphia, 1848) p. 150. Mr. Bryant speaks of "Ogden's Hole" and reports the story that it was named after an old trapper Ogden, who was probably killed there. The latter part of story, of course, is not correct.

25. Oregon Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. XI. p. 273.

"Ogden died September 27, 1854 at the cliffs. Buried in Mountain View Cemetery at Oregon City, a wild rosebush its only adornment. The glistening peak of Mt. Hood its only monument." 25

CHAPTER VII

Government Explorations

Bonneville - Fremont.

Perhaps as a matter of technical accuracy only Fremont's explorations in the Great Basin should here be considered as directly under government sanction and direction. There seems to be ample reason, however, to justify giving the official stamp to discoveries and surveys made by Bonneville's group of explorers. To be sure Bonneville was not in the employ of the government. Indeed, it appears he was out to gratify a rather romantic and adventurous spirit and to enhance his private fortunes. But since he was on furlough from the United States army and away under express military sanction and authority; and, furthermore, since his reinstatement in the army, after having violated his parole, was in the nature of an official interposition by President Jackson, his case stands quite apart from the usual private fur trading companies or free trappers. Moreover, the War Department in granting him leave of absence for two years stated that the purpose of the projected expedition was to "explore the Rocky mountains and beyond, with a view to ascertaining the nature and character of the several tribes inhabiting those regions; the trade which might be carried on profitable with them; the quantity of the soil, the productions, the minerals, the natural history, the climate, the geography and topography, as well as the geology of the various parts of the country." Added to these general purposes was an injunction, implied at least, to secure special information as to the Indian tribes, their number, method of making war, their equipment, alliances, conditions, etc. Thus it is seen that

1. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p. 430.

while not drawing any pay from the government he was under rather explicit instructions as to what was expected of him. His adventures in the Rocky mountains will, therefore, be considered in connection with those of John C. Fremont.

It seems from the instructions quoted that he himself had projected this grand design of exploration and discovery, and had made it the basis of his application for a furlough. Moreover, it was upon such an understanding that the application was granted. The history of his whole three years, 1832-1835, of activity give however, but little indication of any such disinterested purposes. Nor did he after his return make any report to the department at Washington. Since he had executed no part of the design as set forth, he likely had nothing to report. His sole contribution of scientific value was his two maps, one of which represented the regions around the upper reaches of the Missouri river and its affluents, including also the Snake and Green rivers and the Great Salt Lake. The other included the country west of that embraced in the first map, to the Pacific. But even these were based largely upon information furnished by Ashley and Smith, and represented on Gallatin's map which appeared the year before. To be just to Bonneville it should be added that there were a few new and important features. The Humboldt river and lakes were located with considerable accuracy, as was also the San Joaquin river valley in California. But in some respects the Gallatin map was more correct.

If, however, it be granted that his visionary scheme of making explorations and scientific calculations that would contribute valuable information to the government, was a gigantic failure; and further, if it be conceded that he failed too, as a fur trader bent on making a fortune, we must still credit him with furnishing the motive of one of our most valu-

2. Washington Irving, The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U. S. A. in the Rocky Mountains and the Far West; binders title, Bonneville. Revised edition one volume, New York, 1860. Appendix, pp 427-428.

able books on the various adventures and fur trading activities in the Rocky mountains and beyond to the Pacific, during the period when the fur trade had reached its zenith, 1832-1836. Irving's work, "The Rocky Mountains, or Scenes, Incidents and Adventures in the Far West; Digested from the journal of Captain B. L. E. Bonneville of the Army of the United States, and illustrated from various other Sources", contains a wealth of material presented in the author's charming style. It is fair to ask, "should we have had such a book had it not been for Captain Bonneville?" To be sure not more than one third of the book concerns Captain Bonneville directly, the remainder having to do with the activities of all the competitive fur traders in the field; but according to the author himself, Bonneville furnished the suggestion for writing the book and it is around him that the unity of the work is sustained.

But whatever may be said of Bonneville's relations with the government, or of his aims and purposes, or his successes or failures in the field, his expedition was, nevertheless, of considerable importance in Great Basin history. His name is permanently stamped upon the old Quaternary lake and the Great Salt Lake itself barely escaped. The new and valuable features of his maps were the result of an expedition sent out into the interior regions south and west.

At this point it will be enlightening to review briefly the early career of Captain Bonneville, and to call attention to the circumstances

3. Irving, Bonneville pp XIII-XIV.

4. Irving was wont to call the lake, "Lake Bonneville" and so indicated it on his map. He recieved the suggestion no doubt from Bonneville who seemed to be committed to the doctrine "he that exalteth not himself, by man will he not be exalted." See letter of Bonneville's to Lieutenant Warren H. Simpson. Exploration Across the Great Basin of Utah, 1859, pp 19-20. The lake was designated Lake Bonneville on some of the older maps. E. G. Wislezenus in Ausflug nach dem Felsen Gebirgen, St. Louis, 1840.

which led to his rather romantic and adventurous enterprise. As his name, Benjamin Louis Eulalie Bonneville, indicates he was a Frenchman by nativity, and, as his career showed also by temperament. Born in France April 14, 1796, he was early initiated into the excitement and turmoil of the revolutionary period. His father, a publisher in France, and a man of considerable intelligence, with classical leanings, fell under the displeasure of the government, and, like many another in the earlier years of our nation's existence, sought refuge for himself and family in America. For himself, he was unsuccessful, but he succeeded in sending Mme. Bonneville and the future Captain with Thomas Payne, who found the atmosphere in France at this particular time likewise uncongenial to his political health, albeit "liberty was endangered", and consequently contrived to leave secretly for America. For a time the Bonneville family lived with Payne at New Rochelle, New York, and it was through him that young Bonneville secured cadetship at West Point in 1815, where he graduated in 1819.

In 1825, when Lafayette toured the states, Bonneville, then a dashing young officer, was detailed to accompany him as aide. A rather close relationship grew up between them, and upon Lafayette's return to France he took his aide with him, where he remained in the Lafayette home for several years. Returning to America he was assigned to duty on the frontier. Here he heard, no doubt, marvelous stories of the west and exaggerated tales of fortunes to be made in furs. His adventurous spirit responded to the "call of the wild" and he sought for and obtained from the army the furlough to which reference has already been made.

Backed financially by certain financiers in New York, among whom

was Alfred Seton, a former Astorian, he succeeded in organizing a strong company of one hundred and ten men with two assistants, Mr. Joseph R. Walker, and Mr. M. C. Cerre. Splendidly equipped with a fine assortment of goods, the company left Osage ten miles from Independence, May 1, 1832. Contrary to the custom hitherto followed by fur traders, wagons were used on this expedition. There were twenty of these drawn by oxen and mules. This was then, a unique feature; and it should be observed here, these vehicles were the first to be taken over the South Pass into regions beyond. In this respect the venture was truly a pioneer experiment and a successful one.

After reading Irving, one would scarcely venture to detail again the story of this expedition. In any account of western development, however, it cannot be neglected, but only so far as it contributed to this narrative, will it here be considered.

Bonneville proved in many respects an excellent leader. He disciplined his company in true military fashion, and afforded them every protection against the Indians. In fact during the whole three years of his Rocky mountains experiences, not one of his men was killed --- on this score a most remarkable record indeed. He was, too, well liked by

5. Ashley had sent a two wheeled cannon over the mountains to Salt Lake in 1827. It was placed in position at Salt Lake by Sublette and partners. Two years earlier Ashley had suggested the feasibility of a Wagon road over the Pass. Then too, Smith-Jackson-Sublette in a letter to Sec'y of War, J. H. Eaton dated Oct. 29, 1830, (See U.S. Ex. Doc. 21st Cong. 2 Sess. Vol. II, no. 90) had reported that wagons could be easily taken over South Pass. Cf Niles Register, Dec. 9, 1826.

all members of his company. He was prodigal in his good will, and generous in his entertainment at rendezvous, where even the Indians came with expectations of royal treatment. For all this results showed that as a fur trader he was no match for the experienced men and companies in the field. Furthermore, his vaunted "design" to explore new fields and secure for the government valuable information concerning the conditions and the character of the Indians never materialized.

Once in the field --- he arrived on Green River July 17, 1832 --- he directed a variety of enterprises which he hoped would prove lucrative. At the end of the first year, however, he had scarcely made enough to pay the wages of his men. The men gathered into the rendezvous on Green river in July and the furs were counted. It was found the total was only twenty-two and a half packs, or less than twenty skins to the man. Bonneville remained at the post twelve days arranging for the following year's activities. He delegated to his second assistant, M. S. Cerre, the duty of conveying to the states the meagre returns of the year's hunt, while his first assistant J. R. Walker, was commissioned to lead the party of forty men, who, according to Irving, were to carry out the scheme so near to Bonneville's heart, that of exploring the Great Salt Lake. "To have this lake properly explored and all its secrets revealed, was the grand scheme of the captain for the present year."

6. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p. 405.

7. The rendezvous was on Horse Creek, a small affluent of the upper Green river. The post was called Fort Bonneville, or Bonneville's Folly.

8. Wyeth in F. G. Young, Sources of the History of Oregon Vol. I, p 70.

9. Irving, Bonneville, p 187.

Such is Irving's eloquent expression of Bonneville's purpose, and he goes on to explain that no pains nor expense were spared in executing the design. A journal was to be kept of everything curious or interesting, maps and charts were to be made of the route taken and the surrounding country. In short one would glean from the account given that this was to be an expedition into unknown tracts for the purpose of real discovery.

How little this projected adventure around Salt Lake and into the unknown regions beyond the buffalo country represented the real intent of the enterprise will be shown by noting the results. The party of forty, splendidly equipped with supplies for a year, left Fort Bonneville July 24. As a further precaution the party stopped at Bear river and laid in a plentiful supply of buffalo meat and venison. For what?

For their long journey to California; not to go to Salt Lake only a few miles away. Then continuing southward to the head waters of Cassie river, they caught a beautiful view of the great Lake they had been sent (?) to explore, but instead of visiting it, they shunted to the west, and after traveling over a tract which Irving described as having "neither tree, nor herbage, nor spring, nor pool, nor running spring, nothing but parched wastes of sand where horse and rider were in danger of perishing,"¹⁰ they came to a stream which led to the mountains on the west. Down this the party continued to travel, trapping beaver as they went --- a strange way to discover all the mysteries of Salt Lake. Nor did they, after leaving the lake to the east of them, ever come nearer to it again.

This river was of course none other than the Humboldt upon which Ogden and his men had trapped several years ealier. Moreover, the desert

10. Irving op. cit., p. 327.

over which they crossed on turning west from the border of the lake had been traversed back and forth by Ogden between 1826-1830. They were then so far making no new discoveries. Nevertheless from information gained the Humboldt river and lakes were accurately located on the Bonneville map. Then, too, as they continued on south, they began to pioneer new territory. They pushed on south past Humboldt lake to Carson lake and to what has since been known as Walker lake.

It was getting late in the season and they now began to look for a pathway over the mountains into California. Just where they crossed is a mooted question, but probably in the vicinity of Mona lake, a little north, reaching the head waters of the Merced which led them into the San Joaquin valley. They reached the base of the mountains October 30, and some days after Leonard describes the discovery of giant redwood trees. Various other descriptive details lead Chittenden and Wagner to ask, "May this have been the first visit of Americans to the far famed Yosemite?"

But the activities of the party in California during the ensuing winter pertain to the history of that state and must not therefore detain us here. Suffice it to say that the months slipped by all too soon, and compelled them, very reluctantly to leave sunny California and return to

11. If our conclusions are correct concerning Ogden, he traveled clear through this region east of the Sierras and on to the Gulf of California. See Chapter VI. "Peter Skeene Ogden". No detailed account of the country, however, had come to light.

12. Leonard's Narrative, Adventures of Zenas Leonard, Fur Trader and Trapper, 1831-1836. Edited by W. F. Wagner, Cleveland 1904, p. 174 & 180.

13. Chittenden, American Fur Trade, p. 147. Compare Wagner, op. cit. p. 174, foot note.

the Bonneville rendezvous established this season on Bear river. Accordingly on the 14th of February 1834, they "lazily left camp" at Monterey and wended their way up the San Joaquin valley. They secured two Indian guides who conducted them over the mountain by way of what has since been known as Walker Pass. The passage was made without any untoward incident and the guides were dismissed, March 1.

From this point they pursued their monotonous weary way along the foothills until they reached their trail near Battle lake. Their course now lay generally northeast a good portion of the way along the Humboldt. As they approached Salt Lake, however, they again shunted, going north to the Snake and from thence to the appointed rendezvous on Bear river, where they arrived June 1.

This then was the extent of Bonneville's far flung purposes of exploration and discovery. The lake that was to "yield up its secrets" to his scientific observations had not been visited. But what were the actual results? The party had spent going and coming, some six months in the Great basin; they had followed the Humboldt to the sink and explored the region of lakes and ponds beyond as far as the Walker Pass; they were the first to make the overland trip from the borders of Salt Lake to California across the heart of the basin. To be sure Smith had made the

14. This is where occurred the massacre of Digger Indians in the region of Pyramid lakes, called by Leonard, Battle lakes. I have purposely omitted any discussion of these Indian massacres which cast such a stigma upon the walker party. The question is a partisan one, and has led to intense controversy. For original material recounting the massacres and various views concerning them, see Irving, Bonneville, pp 340-341; Leonard Narrative, pp 160-164; Bancroft, History of Nevada, p 43 ff.

trip from California east to Salt Lake though considerable south of the Humboldt no doubt. In California they had made some notable discoveries, especially if it be conceded that they were the first to see the Yosemite. On the whole, however; nothing had been accomplished to fulfill the high expectations of Bonneville as pictured by Irving, nor, indeed, to gratify his hopes regarding profits. It was, in short, a failure and Bonneville so regarded it.

Irving in summing the matter up declares that Bonneville was deeply grieved at the failure of his plans, and indignant at the atrocities committed against the Indians. "The failure of this expedition was a blow to his pride, and still a greater blow to his purse. The Great Salt Lake still remained unexplored; at the same time the means which had been furnished so liberally to fit out this expedition, had all been squandered at Monterey, and the peltries, also, which had been collected on the way."¹⁵

That Bonneville was keenly disappointed was no doubt true, but not because Salt Lake was still unsurveyed or unknown regions still unexplored. His real grief was because of the failure of the hunt. He was losing money, not making a fortune. His hopes of finding fruitful trapping grounds between Salt Lake and the Pacific had been defeated; for from the very beginning the plan was to send an expedition to California and the Pacific. It was hoped thus to checkmate his competitors in the Snake and Green river regions, who were outwitting him at every

15. Irving, Bonneville, p. 341.

turn. His grandiloquent Salt Lake scheme was an after thought, given reality by auto-suggestion. This can be said with all assurance despite Irving's sincere expression of Bonneville's declaration to the contrary.

Without entering into any extended discussion of this matter, it may be said that since the publication of the Zenas Leonard Narrative,¹⁶ and the information derived from the George Nidever manuscript now in the Bancroft library, the purpose of this undertaking is clearly manifest. Both of these men were members of the Walker party and the former might almost be called its historian. Neither makes any mention of any purpose to explore Salt Lake, but both set forth the intent to go to California and the Pacific. Says Leonard in relation to the plan, "there was a large tract of land laying to the southwest of this (the upper Green river) extending to the Columbia river on the North and to the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of California on the west and south which was said to abound with beaver, and other wise suited as a trading country --- the other division under a Mr. Walker was ordered to steer through an unknown country towards the Pacific, and if he did not find beaver, he should return to the Great Salt Lake the following summer. ----

I was anxious to go the the coast of the Pacific and for that purpose
17
hired with Mr. Walker as clerk, for a certain sum per year."

16. This narrative is repeatedly cited in this article. It is our most valuable source for details of the Walker expedition.

17. Leonard, op. cit. pp 146-147.

Nidever is equally silent with reference to any purpose other than this. In fact, he joined the party for the primary purpose of seeking the more congenial climate of California for the benefit of his health.¹⁸

Joe Meek, too, was a member of the party and his experiences have been romantically woven into Mrs. Victor's "The River of the West." He says¹⁹ nothing of this proposed scheme.

This argument of silence is supported by an incident that occurred sometime previous to the expedition. The Boston adventurer, Nathaniel J. Wyeth, met Bonneville somewhere near Henry Fork of Snake river, and there proposed to him a joint hunt in the country to the southwest as far as to the mountains of California. Bonneville accepted but subsequently attempted, as we have seen, to carry out the plan on his own account. Why then is Captain Bonneville so famed in Salt Lake and Utah basin history? Why is the traveler who views the Wasatch and sees there three distinct water lines told that these mark the successive levels of Lake Bonneville? The answer is Irving's Adventures of Captain Bonneville, and Bonneville's relationship to the War Department and to President Jackson through his maps. Nothing he accomplished would justify any such honors. For three years he was in the vicinity

18. Ibid, 148-149, footnote by Wagner. Compare Bancroft, History of Utah, p. 25. Bancroft draws from the Nidever Ms.

19. Mrs. Francis Aretta Victor, The River of the West, San Francisco, 1870, passim.

of Salt Lake and part of the time not more than fifty miles distant, and yet his curiosity never prompted him even to visit its shores. With information gained from others he let his imagination run riot in describing it, and made some wild guesses relative to the valley in which it is located.²⁰ But actual performance was lacking. Nevertheless he succeeded in getting his maps, which were really valuable, and his story popularized, and thus made a valuable contribution to Great Basin History, and greatly stimulated subsequent interest and eventual settlement therein.

JOHN C. FREMONT

Of a far different character were the surveys made by Colonel John C. Fremont, the energetic, romantic, self contained, and self assertive enigma of American History. His "delineation and maps" were, according to his own story, based upon actual observation and exploration, and this is essentially true. While he accepted and utilized information from others, he did not, as did Bonneville, base his calculations concerning Great Salt Lake or any of the other regions described, upon observations taken fifty miles distant. He was a real explorer and well equipped for the topographical work for which he had been employed by the government. His title of "Pathfinder"

20. Irving, op. cit. pp 185-186. Bonneville estimates the altitude of Salt Lake valley as a mile and three quarters or 9240 feet, a slight error of more than 5000 ft. The lowest altitude of the plateau is something under 4200 feet.

is perhaps quite misleading, as most of the paths he traveled, and the greater part of the country over which he roamed with real scientific as well as adventurous interest, had been well known by the fur traders and trappers for a quarter of a century. He, however, was the first to delineate these pathways on paper, and to project with mathematical skill and accuracy the many topographical features of this remarkable region between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific coast. In this respect, then, it is legitimate to speak of him as a pioneer explorer.

In many respects Fremont might be compared with Bonneville. Both were of French descent, though Fremont had an American mother. Both obtained positions in the army and entered upon their exploring enterprises either directly or indirectly under government patronage. The heritage of each was a back ground of revolutionary experience in early youth, and they seemed to imbibe in common the spirit of bold and adventurous enterprise. But what is of more concern to us here is that it was they two, more than any others, who, deservedly or undeservedly, awakened public and popular interest in the interior basin and California. Fremont's reports published by authority of the government, and Bonneville's story and maps popularized by Irving, were the most influential factors in broadening the vision and extending the horizon of the restless home seekers, and the ardent expansionists. Fremont's official report, 1845, in particular created wide-spread interest everywhere.

His naturally keen mind and adventurous spirit were greatly disciplined and stimulated by close association with Nicollet, another wander-

ing Frenchman who came to America to make his contribution of scientific skill and intellectual alertness to American enterprise and development. A trained scientist of the first order, and an ardent lover of the great "out of doors" of the American wilderness, he was, in 1838, commissioned by the government to make some extended surveys of the region between the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Fremont was made his second lieutenant. For him then, the next two years, 1838-1839, constituted a vital period in his career. His mathematically trained mind caught the spirit of the trained expert --- a spirit that remained with him and stamped its impress upon all his future explorations for the government.

Nor is this all; it was through Nicollet that he met often with ²¹ groups of interested explorers at Senator Benton's home in St. Louis. Here plans and purposes relative to the development of the Great West were talked over, and here too he met Miss Jessie Benton, his future wife and loyal supporter throughout all his varied career. It might appropriately be remarked here too, that it was from these meetings that Bention carried into the United States senate such unbounded enthusiasm for everything western. Then, too, it was through Senator Benton that he, Fremont, received his appointment to lead the expedition with which his name is most prominently connected. How admirably equipped by training, experience, and natural ability, he accomplished a work, 1842-1846, the importance of which can scarcely be overestimated.

21. See article by Mfs. Jessie Benton Fremont, "The Origin of the Fremont Explorations" in Century Magazine. Vol. 19 (new series).

With his first exploring tour to the Rocky Mountains, that of 1842, interesting though it may be, we have no particular concern. It reached only to the South Pass, then already well known, and hence made no contribution to Great Basin history. The second and third, however, proved vitally important, and require special attention.

It was in May 1843 that he with a company of thirty-nine men, left Kansas city on his second expedition. Through the loyalty and sympathy of his wife he barely escaped at this point, a peremptory recall to Washington to explain why a peaceful exploring party was equipped with a howitzer and general military accoutrements. Mrs. John Charles however opened the countermanding order, retained it, and sent to him instead a peremptory command to leave Kansas city for Fort Bent at once ready or not ready and not to stop to ask or reason why.²³ In this instance he showed none of the insubordination charged against him in some other cases, but, fortunately for himself, obeyed his wife's orders and moved camp May 29th.

Deviating his course somewhat from that of 1842, he made various detours, hoping as he explained, to find an accessible route south of the Platte in a warmer and more congenial climate. On the whole, however, the main company followed pretty closely the Oregon trail, over the south Pass to Fort Hall. Fremont, at all important points made interesting and

22. For a list of these men see, Fremont, Captain J. C. Brevet, Narrative of the Explorations Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the year 1842, and to Oregon and North California in the years 1843-1844. Philadelphia, 1846, p. 55. Hereafter cited Fremont, Exploring Expedition.

accuracy observations and surveys of the country. He gave the altitude of South Pass as 7490 feet, which is slightly higher than that²⁴ given by the Union Pacific.

In practically all of his delineations and analytical observations, he was accurate, and technically correct on the whole. Not only did he describe the topography of the country, but he made chemical tests²⁵ of the water of any unusual springs or lakes, commented on the nature of the soil, its fertility or sterility as the case might be and expressed his judgment as to the productivity of different sections and the possibility of future settlements. Some of these observations had far reaching results, as shall be seen in another connection later on in this narrative.

Many tales had been circulated concerning the mysterious Salt Lake, and Fremont had heard stories at the campfire that aroused his keenest interest. It seems that some speculated still regarding the mythical river outlet to the ocean. Others visualized great whirlpools and subterranean passages to the sea.

23. See Mrs. J. C. Fremont. op. cit.

24. In some cases slight corrections were necessary, but these may be due to variation in the points of taking the altitude, and in atmospheric conditions.

25. He tested the water of Soda or Beer Springs on the Bear River, Bonneville suggested that it tasted somewhat like the original Teutonic beverage.

The appeal of the mysterious and unknown possessed a real charm to Fremont, who resolved personally to investigate the grounds upon which these fanciful yarns were built, Accordingly, upon reaching Bear river he steered his course towards this inland sea. On the 6th of September he ascended an elevated peninsula on the north of Weber river and caught his first glimpse of the shimmering lake.

In an ecstasy of delight he recalls the occasion of Balboa discovering the Pacific. If he intened, --- which he probably²⁶ did not --- as one notable historian suggests, to compare himself to Balboa, of course the claim was absurd. He did, however, assert with apparent seriousness that the party selected for²⁷ the boat expedition was the "first ever attempted on this interior sea." In this of course he was clearly in error, four men in a boat having circumambulated it seventeen years earlier. But he was the first to explore it scientifically and to make accurate mathematical calculations as to altitude, area, etc., and the²⁸ first to test its waters and discover their constituent elements.

Nor is this all. Curious to know of the islands visible in the distance they steered their course to one since known as Disappointment Island or Castle Island. There they remained all night. Before leaving, Fremont made his usual painstaking observations. He found the

26. H. H. Bancroft, History of Utah, p. 32. San Francisco 1889.

27. Fremont, Exploring Expedition, p. 87.

28. Ibid. p. 91. The altitude of the lake was found to be slightly under 4200 feet. It will be recalled that Bonneville estimated it at 9420 feet.

bare rocky peak, the highest point on the island, to be eight hundred feet above the level of the lake. This elevated position furnished a picturesque view of the wide expanse of water hedged in by ragged mountains. There was much to learn and Fremont was loathe to leave without further surveys, but necessity compelled him. Upon taking leave, he writes, "we feel pleasure also in remembering that we were the first who in the traditional annals of the country, had visited the island and broken with the cheerful sound of human voices, the long solitude of the place." In this assertion there was no exaggeration; they were real explorers of this island.

After remaining in the vicinity of the lake for five days, making observations that were later to be graphically portrayed on his maps and in his official reports, the party resumed their journey towards Fort Hall and into Oregon. But before taking leave of Bear river valley, which apparently had impressed him greatly, he makes the following significant comment. "The bottoms are extensive, water excellent, timber sufficient, the soil good and well adapted to grains and grasses suited to such an elevated region." He also praised the bunch grass, declaring that "no more nutritious grass ever grew."

30

29. Fremont, p. 89.

30. Ibid, pp, 92-93.

Soon thereafter the party were in Oregon making their way towards the historic Vancouver. But their experiences in this section are not our concern here. However, Fremont is soon to return to the Great Basin and make further explorations and surveys of considerable note. In fact it seems the charm of the novel and the mysterious is still with him, and he harbors the notion of finding the mythical river, Buenaventura, which was assumed to flow from Salt Lake or Sevier Lake westward into the Pacific. He seems to be ignorant of the fact, or indifferent to the evidence, if he were familiar with it, that this myth had long since been exploded. Both Jedediah S. Smith and Joseph Walker had by their actual travels through and around the basin dispelled this notion. Furthermore, the maps of Gallatin, Bonneville, and Wilkes, 1836, 1837, and 1841, respectively, all showed this region without any such river. And yet Fremont was still hunting for it, and Benton could say that "all maps up to that time (the time of Fremont's survey) had shown 31 this region (Great Basin) traversed by a great river called Beunaventura." Like the straits of Anian, the mystery would not down.

Not what is true in history, but what men think is true, is often the highest stimulus to action. So in this case there was visioned a broad smiling river with grassy banks and refreshing waters, where the winter could be enjoyed under cottonwood groves, and in a climate congenial and happy, and the myth became the motive for new adventure and endeavor.

It was late in fall, November 10, 1843, before the party left Vancouver. Fully and finely equipped with provisions for three months,

31. Thomas H. Benton, Thirty Years View; or a History of the Workings of the American Government for Thirty Years. 2 Vols. N.Y. 1856. Binder's title, Thirty Years in U.S. Senate. See Vol. II, p. 580.

they commenced their march up the Columbia and southward to the interior. Rugged, rustic, and romantic was the scenery as they caught glimpses of Mt. Rainier, (Now Tacoma) Mt. St. Helena, Mt. Hood, Mt. Jefferson, and the intervening variations of river fall, cascades, and rapids, and the variegated color scheme of clouds and distant plains. Confidently the company moved southward, still projecting in imagination the elysian valleys of a Buenaventura.

Continuing a little east of south, they reached Klamath (Fremont spells it Lamath) Marsh December 10. From here eastward they went, making interesting observations all the while, until on Dec. 16th after facing blinding snow storms, and struggling through snow three
33 feet deep, they came to the crest of the dividing ridge and gazed on the valley below. The storm slackened and the sun broke through the clouds, disclosing to them a beautiful lake a thousand feet below. Grassy plains bedecked its border, and all looked calm and serene and
34 inviting. Says Fremont, "not a particle of ice was to be seen on
35 the lake, or snow on its borders, and all was like summer or spring." Almost estatically he goes on describing how the scene revived their

33. Fremont, Exploring Expedition p. 124.

34. loc. cit.

35. loc. cit.

hearts, and made the woods ring with joyful shouts of pleasure.

By way of contrast and symbolism the two proximate places were named Winter ridge and Summer lake, by which name the lake has ever^{since} been known.

It was dark that night before the party succeeded in reaching the valley below. They were now once again in the Great basin, this time on its north western rim. Their journey southward to Carson Pass was one of real discovery and exploration. ³⁷ Interesting though it would be, it would take us too far a field to follow in detail the experiences of the party the next two months. Suffice it to say that all was not as rosy as the first view of Summer lake led them to expect. They had struggles with cold and drouth, and deserts, and rocky roads, and every variety of weather. At sundry times they found themselves in snow and winter storm. Painstaking observations were made in all kinds of country and despite the weather. Various names were given to local features, many of which have remained to the present time. Some of them are, Christmas lake, Summer lake, Albert lake, and Pyramid lake. The latter name was suggested by a huge rock which projected its point some six hundred

36. The Rocky Mountain and Great Basin regions are noted for their rapid transitions of climate due to variation in altitude and wind exposure. The writer has, on the rim of the Basin in southern Utah, passed in the course of two hours and over only an eighth mile stretch, from snow three feet deep to green lucern fields.

37. Peter Skeene Ogden had traversed this region east of the Sierra Nevada range clear to the Gulf of California, but no details of the journey were available. See Chapter VI ante.

feet above the water and reminded Fremont of the Pyramid of Cheops.

But the Humboldt river, so named by Fremont on his next expedition --- was missed, and of course no Buenventura river materialized. On the contrary the country was rather monotonous, in places, desolate and forbidding, and on the whole difficult to travel over. Still Fremont's faith in the mystical river seems not to waver. January 3, 1844, he records, "were evidently on the verge of the desert which had been reported to us; and the appearance of the country was so forbidding, that I was afraid to enter it, and determined to bear away to the southward, keeping close among the mountains, in the full expectation of reaching the Buenaventura river." ³⁸

Why did not Kit Carson and Fitzpatrick disillusion him? Both of them were in the company and should have known better. Were they, too, hypnotized with the imaginary elixir of life?

At any rate southward the party continued to go, clinging to Fremont's resolve not to penetrate the "forbidding" desert eastward --- evidently the original intent. Finally abandoning entirely the idea of exploring this intervening country in the dead of winter, the Lieutenant, January 18, announced to his men the intention of crossing the Sierra's to California. The news was received with rejoicing, and with considerable difficulty the feat was accomplished.

38. Fremont, Exploring Expedition, p. 129.

Interesting, almost thrilling are the details of this herculean undertaking, but they do not fall within the scope of our rectial here. Suffice it to say, that between Jan. 18 and March 5, all difficulties were surmounted and Sutter's Fort reached. This was the fifth time the Sierras had been crossed by Americans and the third time from East to west from the great basin.

After spending twelve days at Sutter's Fort, the party commenced the homeward journey up the San Joaquin valley towards southern California. Fremont, no doubt, "took in" the political situation in California, and certainly his close observations of the country, its climate and products, constituted a valuable part of his subsequent reports.

The return trip was of no great concern to Great Basin history, as no new features were disclosed. It seems to have been the original purpose when leaving California to cross through the heart of the desert directly to Salt Lake, but an Indian visitor gave such a discouraging report of the arid, barren region, that the plan was changed and the return made south over the Techapi Pass, across the Mojave desert and by way of the old Spanish trail to Provo and Utah Lake, and

39. Jedediah Smith crossed from west to east in 1827; Joseph Walker and the Bonneville Company crossed from west to east and the reverse direction in 1833-1834, and the Bartleson-Bidwell Company had made the journey through the basin and over the mountains in 1842.

40. Perhaps this is an overstatement. A slight deviation from the Spanish Trail was made south and west of the present site of St. George. The Santa Clara Creek, a branch of the Virgin, was discovered and named and followed until an opening was found into the Mountain Meadows.

from thence up Spanish Fork Canon --- a deviation from the Oregon trail over into the Strawberry country to Duchesne and thence to the Green river and back to Kansas City via Fort Bent.

This was truly a remarkable expedition and fraught with far reaching results. Except the stretch from Salt Lake down the Humboldt, Fremont had been practically around the border of the Basin, named it, discovered and described, for all time to come some of its marked peculiarities; and, moreover, through his most favorable comment upon parts of Bear river valley had attracted attention prophetic of future settlement.⁴¹ Furthermore, he had satisfied himself of a fact that should already have been known, that there was no Buena Ventura river leading from some lake at the base of the Rockies, through the inland basin to the Bay of San Francisco. On this score, commenting upon his taking leave of California to cross the Mojave desert, he says, "no river from the interior does or can, cross the Sierra Nevada -- there is no opening from the Bay of San Francisco into the interior of the continent."⁴² Of course, as repeatedly shown, Smith had made this known seventeen years before.

A combination of circumstances urged a third expedition into the Great Basin which, in some of its aspects, is even more important than the one just described. This is the famous expedition

41. See "Why the Mormons Came", Chap. IX, Post.

42. Fremont, Memoirs, p. 255.

of 1845-1846, which in the end connected itself with national

43

purposes and military exploits far beyond the scope of this

narrative. Ostensibly, however, it was another topographical exploration, and so far as the Great Basin is concerned, was such.

The party was exceedingly well equipped and provided for; and after final preparations at Fort Bent, left that point August 16, and reached the head of Timpanogas (Provo) river October 2. They followed this river down to Utah Lake and from thence went on to Salt Lake where they arrived October 13. Fremont remained here two weeks engaged in real topographical work. In the meantime,

44

with Carson and several others, he rode his horse out to a small island in the lake, which he found covered with grass, pastured by numerous antelope.

From here he wanted to strike out across the unknown parts of the Great Basin which he assumed neither Carson nor Walker knew anything about. Of course this again is Fremont exaggeration.

Nevertheless he starts out westward in a country unknown to him and is soon at the well known, Ogden or Mary's river, which he

43. Perhaps all these topographical explorations were connected with broad national aims looking to the eventual acquisition of California. From the very first at least, the "Inner circle" had designs for transcending mere geographical information. See Mrs. Jessie Fremont, The Origin of the Fremont Explorations, op cit, loc cit, Cf, Frederick S. Bellenbaugh, Fremont and '49, New York, 1914, pp 108-110, also ibid pp 49-50, 103-106.

44. The water was so shallow at that time of the year that the men experienced little difficulty in riding their horses to this island.

now named Humboldt. He does this he says in honor of the great
45
scientific explorer, Alexander Humboldt. This is the first
application of the name and it has since remained, thus depriving
the real discoverer, Ogden, of the distinction due him.

Here the party was divided, one group under Talbot with
46
Edward M. Kern as topographer, and Joseph Walker as guide, were
to follow and survey the Humboldt to its sink and thence south
to Walker Lake, and the other under Fremont himself southward on
a tour of real exploration. At the Walker Lake they again met
and reversed their directions somewhat. The main body still guided
by Walker went south to enter California over the Walker Pass.
Fremont with a select group went north to Carson river and thence
over the Donner Pass into California, where we must leave him
again.

In his memoirs, Fremont does not say very much concern-
ing this inland exploration but we find some interesting and signi-
ficant comment concerning it in a letter written to his wife, and
47
bearing date, San Francisco, January 24, 1846. Among other things
he says, "on every map or extent manuscript the Great Basin is
pictured as barren desert. Tell your father (Senator Benton)

45. Fremont, Memoirs, p. 424.

46. Mr. Kern has left a valuable journal of this expedition
printed in J. H. Simpson, Exploration across the Great Basin
of Utah in 1859. Appendix pp. 476-486.

47. See Niles Register, May 16, 1846, p. 161.

that with a party of fifteen men I crossed it between parallels 38 and 39 and it is in its whole extent, traversed by parallel ranges of mountains covered with plenty of grass. Deer and mountain sheep in great numbers roam over these mountains." etc.⁴⁸

Here is shown quite another aspect of this so called basin, which is really a succession of basins and valleys and desert wastes but not by any means all desert.

In summing up the work of Bonneville and Fremont it must be said that they, more than any others, awakened public and national interest in the Far West, and particularly the Great Basin. Neither was an original explorer or a real discoverer. Even Fremont, who comes much more nearly earning such a title, followed in many instances trails and highways as well known to the traders and trappers as was the Appian Way to the denizens of ancient Rome. Moreover, on all his expeditions he had scouts from among the mountain trappers for his guides and advance guards. Among these may be mentioned Kit Carson, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Joseph Walker, Wm. Gilpin, Gody, et. al. These were of the group of real explorers who deserve great honors. Nevertheless it was Fremont who brought these explorations to book, who delineated and described in such a way as to arouse wide spread public interest, reaching even across

48. loc cit.

the oceans to foreign countries. His work, too, was in the main thoroughly scientific and permanently useful. Hence it is that such emphasis has been given to these two notable characters, who in large measure summed up the activities and reaped the reward of the courage and adventure, and toil and sacrifice, of others who had gone before.

CHAPTER VIII
THE DECADE BEFORE THE COMING OF THE
MORMONS

Parallelling and immediately preceding Fremont's expeditions, a variety of activities in the Great Basin were transforming that region from an Indian wilderness into a white man's country. Its geography was well known by the trappers and mountain men in general, and its industrial possibilities were beginning to attract attention. Beaver trappers were becoming less numerous, but Spanish slave traders were visiting with increasing frequency the southern half of the basin, while emigrant trains, after 1841, passing almost continuously along the northern border via Bear river, intervening desert, Humboldt river and lakes gave evidence of wide spread interest in the transmontane west. To be sure the goal was still California. This at least was generally the case. There were some, however, who were interested not in getting through the basin to the more attractive regions beyond, but in making their fortunes within it. These were the Mexican slave traders.

SPANISH SLAVE TRADE IN THE GREAT BASIN

In addition to those who sought to enhance their fortunes by catching furs in the fruitful rivers of the Great Basin, there were those who found it more profitable to engage in the nefarious business of trafficking in Indian slaves. In an earlier chapter it was seen that this degrading practice was beginning as early as 1813, the date¹ of the Arze-Garcia expedition. After the Mexican revolution, 1819-1821,

1. See Chapter I, ante p. 17.

this trade, as well as other branches of commercial activity, was greatly accentuated. Incidental evidence seems to prove that almost continuously after this, Spaniards from New Mexico passed over the Spanish Trail into the now familiar interior to capture or to buy Indian women and children. By the late 30's this kind of business became a fixed custom which was perpetuated until some years after the Mormons settled the valleys.

Some rather interesting incidents in Utah history grew out of this custom. Although these events are in general beyond the scope of this review, some of them throw particular light upon the subject in hand, and are therefore relevant at this point.

The Mormons always sought the friendship of the Indians, and tried by every peaceable means to placate their hereditary vengeance and promote their good will. It seems, however, that certain Mexicans came into the territory to trade with these Indians; and, following a long established custom, purchased from them children to be sold as slaves. Incidentally, or wilfully as the case might be, they excited the Indians to depredations against the inhabitants. Such pernicious activities called forth from Brigham Young, then Governor of Utah, the following proclamation, issued² April 23, 1853:

"Whereas it is made known to me by reliable information from affidavits, and various other sources, that there is in this territory a horde of Mexicans, or outlandish men, who are infesting the settlements, stirring up the Indians to make aggressions upon the inhabitants, and who are furnishing the Indians with guns, ammunition, etc., contrary to the laws of this territory and the United States.

2. Bancroft, History of Utah, p. 476, also Whitney, History of Utah, Vol. I, p. 512. This proclamation first appeared in the Deseret News of April 30,

"And whereas it is evident that it is the intention of these Mexicans or foreigners to break the laws of this Territory and the United States, utterly regardless of every restriction, furnishing Indians with guns and powder, whenever and wherever it suits their designs, convenience, or purpose:

"Therefore, I, Brigham Young, Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Territory of Utah, in order to preserve peace, quell the Indians and secure the lives and property of the Territory hereby order and direct as follows:"

What followed was an order for a detachment of thirty men to go south through the settlements, warn the people, and apprehend all such "strolling Mexicans" and keep them in custody until further advised.

As a type of the laws these Mexicans (they were probably Spaniards from New Mexico) were violating reference might here be made to a legislative enactment of Utah, January 31, 1852, a little more than a year earlier than this proclamation. The preamble of said law read as

³
follows:

"From time immemorial, the practice of purchasing women and children of the Utah tribes of Indians by Mexican traders, has been indulged in and carried on by these respective people, until the Indians consider it an allowable traffic, and frequently offer their prisoners or children for sale."

Nor have we merely laws and proclamations upon which to base the case of such active operations in the Great Basin. As early as November 15, 1851, the Deseret News sounded a warning that a Mexican party under Pedro Leon, were in Manti, San Pete valley, trying to trade horses for Indian children. Moreover, Leon held a license signed by Governor James S. Calhoun and dated Santa Fe, August 14, 1851. This identifies the

1853. A little later it appeared in La Cronica de Nueva York, from which it was copied by El Siglo Diez Y Nueve, (Mexico) in its issue of July 16, 1853. On July 20, 1853, this same paper devoted the entire front page to the subject in opposition to Governor Youngs action.

3. (from page 3) Utah Laws, Statutes, etc. Acts, Resolutions, and Memorials, (Salt Lake City, 1855) p. 71.

Mexicans as Spaniards from New Mexico.

The announcement of the presence of this party aroused considerable concern, and later eight of the group including Leon, the leader, were arrested and tried before the justice of the peace of Mantia in the winter of 1851-1852. Still later the case came up before Zerubbabel Snow, judge of the First District Court, and was decided against the defendants, and the Indian slaves in their possession were liberated and the Mexicans⁴ sent away.

In summing up the evidence, Judge Snow pointed out that the previous September (1851) twenty-eight Spaniards left New Mexico on a trading expedition with the Utah Indians in their various localities in New Mexico and Utah, that before leaving one, Pedro Leon, obtained from the Governor of New Mexico a license to trade on his own account with the Utah Indians in all their various localities, that upon exhibiting this license to Governor Young he was told that the license did not authorize trade with the Indians in Utah, and he himself would not grant a license that authorized traffic in women and children. The Spaniards then promised they would not trade with the Indians, but would go immediately home. All but eight⁵ kept their promise. These were the defendants in the case described.

Now several matters are made clear by these items. The preamble to the law referred to above charged that "from time immemorial" the practice of purchasing slaves, women and children, from the Utah Indians, had been prevalent. Governor Young's proclamation indicated there were many of these traders throughout the settlements, and the case described

4. Bancroft, History of Utah, p. 475, Whitney, History of Utah, Vol. I, pp 510-511.

5. Whitney, History of Utah, op cit loc cit.

gives positive proof of the fact.

To be sure, these cases are beyond the time period covered by this narrative, but they are only examples of long continued practice. Indeed, it seems that the Utah Basin was a regular center of such trade. It is interesting to note in this connection a comment of Dick Wooten,⁶ who apparently was trapping in the Utah country in 1837-1838. He says, "It was no uncommon thing to see a party of Mexicans in that country (the Great Basin) buying Indian slaves, in those days, (back in the 30's) and while we were trapping here I sent a lot of peltries to Taos by a party of these same slave traders, some of whom I happened to know."⁷

It appears perfectly evident from all this that the region south of Utah Lake must have been well known and frequently visited during the first half of the nineteenth century. Uncle Dick Wooten, in speaking of this slave traffic, uses the phrase "no uncommon thing" and the preamble to the Utah law against the traffic (1852) says "from time immemorial" etc. The facts seem well established that while no permanent colonies were planted, this unknown country was becoming well known by certain strolling Spaniards and also by adventurous Americans.

These slave traders made no permanent impression upon the country, planted no colonies and developed no resources at least so far as is generally known. There are, however, some suggestions of domestic pursuits and even of settlement in southern Utah. Until quite recently, there were in the Bull Valley mountains, just beyond the southwestern rim of the Basin, certain wild cattle that early Mormon settlers found there --- cattle no one seemed to claim. I, myself, have helped to

6. Howard, Louis Conrad, Uncle Dick Wooten, the Pioneer Frontiersman of the Rocky Mountains, Chicago, 1890, p. 78-80.

chase these cattle, and participated in a barbecue furnished by one of the bulls killed in the round up. Where did these animals come from? This has been somewhat of a puzzle to the writer.

In this connection another matter of a different character but of similar import might be given for what it is worth. Carvalho, the artist of Fremont's last expedition to the Great Basin, relates the following incident, which occurred while traveling with President Young and a company of leading Mormons through the settlements of Utah in 1854. The party was coming down Red Creek Canon, when near the mouth they came to the remains of a cabin built of adobes; "ancient articles of housekeeping have been found there. These remains were remarked by the first Mormons who came in the valley; Indians never live in adobe houses, 8 their lodges are all of umbrageous foliage, or skins of animals." Such is the brief account given by Carvalho. Was this once a Spanish settlement, or a prehistoric one? The question is still to be solved.

THE GOODYEAR GRANT

At this point it is apropos to speak of a more tangible settlement --- one that constituted at least the nucleus of a colony. For some twelve years before the Mormons entered the valley, one Miles Goodyear, had been running a ranch in Ogden valley, near Ogden City. He had this ranch comparatively well stocked with cattle, horses, and goats. O. A. Kennedy in an article entitled "First Building built in Ogden: Story of Miles Goodyear", published in the Ogden Standard, 9 Ogden, Utah, July 11, 1914, gives the number as thirty horses, one

7. Howard Louis Conrad, Uncle Dick Wooten, the Pioneer Frontiersman of the Rocky Mountains, Chicago, 1890, p. 80.

8. E. F. Carvalho, "Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West with Colonel Fremont's last expedition". N. Y., 1858, p. 207.

9. This article is now in the Bancroft Library in the possession of Mr. J. J. Hill.

hundred cattle, and two hundred and fifty goats. Further on he quotes James M. Brown, son of Captain Brown, who bought the Goodyear Grant, as saying, "when we got through to the Fort that fall (1846) we found father and my older brothers living in the cabins at the Fort. They had got about fifty cattle from Goodyear and there were forty milk cows, that were milking. There were about one hundred Mexican goats and twenty Mexican sheep, the kind with long straight wool. There were more than fifty horses mostly of Spanish and Indian blood."

Now who was Miles Goodyear, and what was and how came this Goodyear fort and ranch? The following from the genealogical files of Merlin J. Stone is perhaps the best summary of facts and traditions now obtainable. (Letter attached).

- - - -

"The following article is taken from the Merlin J. Stone Genealogical Files, 2869 Grant Avenue, Ogden, Utah.

"About the year 1835 Miles M. Goodyear, a trapper and hunter and also in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company, succeeded in obtaining a grant of land from the Mexican Government, embracing a large portion of what is now the county of Weber. The grant included all the land embraced within the following boundaries:

"Commencing at the mouth of Weber Canyon and turning due west to the Great Salt Lake; commencing again at the mouth of Weber Canyon and running thence northeast along the "high water mark" or base of the mountains to a point known as the Hot Springs; thence due west to the lake comprising all the lands in the above inclosure from the mountain to the lake.

10. In the private library of Merlin J. Stone (now dead) 2869 Grant Avenue, Ogden, Utah, is to be found one of the best collections extant of early Utah history and tradition. Through the courtesy of E. Maude Stone, daughter of the deceased, the writer of this narrative received this information concerning Goodyear.

"Miles M. Goodyear was probably born in the West, but the earliest known of him was at the age of 15 years, at which time he was living with Captain Grant at Fort Hall, in what is now Idaho, near the site of the present Fort Hall. Captain Grant was in control of the fort there, and was one of the leading agents of the Hudson Bay Company. At this Fort and with Captain Grant, Miles M. Goodyear passed his life from his fifteenth year until he was twenty-one. He then struck out for himself, and coming south entered this valley from the north, his predecessor Peter Skeene Ogden having come in from the east.

"It is thought that Goodyear purchased his grant from Mexico, having left Fort Hall. However that may be, Goodyear took possession of his Mexican Grant in the year 1835 and lived on the land continually for about a dozen years, hunting, trapping, and trading with the Indians. The old Fort which had been partly built, perhaps by Ogden, many years before, but which had been vacated by its builder, was taken possession of by Goodyear, who enlarged and strengthened it and made of it the most pretentious Fort south of Fort Hall and on to the New Mexican Front. This is evidence that Goodyear had considerable trade with the Indians, and was a man of large influence, being highly respected by the tribes with which he did trading.

"This Fort covered about one eighth of an acre originally and was made very strong, built so close to the river's edge that water could be obtained without much risk even during times of special danger. The fort was built of cottonwood logs, mostly round and a foot or more in diameter, some, however, being split in half, logs, placed in an upright position, their butts sunk firmly in the ground and their tops sharpened. The logs were from twelve to fifteen feet high above the ground and set very close together. Loop holes were made on each side by setting two logs just outside the line of the wall, one log of the regular wall being omitted, but with logs two thirds of the regular height filling in the openings, thus made at the ends of the two outside logs. Within the inclosure were three log houses, built in a row in the southwest corner of the fort. Sometime after Goodyear took possession of the old fort, it was enlarged by building on to the north end an inclosure same size as the original inclosure, the logs forming the walls not being quite so high but probably about ten feet above the ground and sharpened on top. The new inclosure was used as a corral, Goodyear having collected a little stock about him. He was married to a Squaw, but as to his children, there seems to be no recollection among the pioneers. When Goodyear sold his Spanish Grant in 1848 he went east for a time, but he had been too long used to the wild freedom of the mountains and forests and the rough companionship of the Indians and soon came back into the West, going to California where he later died. Thus passed out of the events of this region the second white man whose prominence has preserved his name."

Merlin J. Stone.

Out of the foregoing a number of interesting questions arise.

Where did Mr. Goodyear get the cattle, horses, goats, and sheep? Did they come from Mexico or New Mexico? Or did he get them from Captain James Grant the Hudson Bay Factor at Fort Hall? We cannot say. Did he really get such a grant as here described, from the authorities of New Mexico? It is perhaps very doubtful. However, the following extract from a letter recently recieved will throw some light on this phase of the question. "My father, Cap. James Brown bought the Goodyear Grant in the winter of 1847. He brought wheat, corn, etc., from California and raised a crop on the same the following year, 1848. My father died fifty-nine years ago and the Goodyear Grant was turned over to my brother Jesse. My brother William took the grant to a Salt Lake lawyer to see if the Brown's couldn't get something from it, but the grant has not been seen since that time, 11 so now there is no clue whatever."

This is the situation as it stands to-day. If there was ever a grant secured from the Mexican Government, it is now lost. The fact remains that there was a twelve year old settler on the Weber, when the Mormons came, and the old fort still survives. At least a portion of it is being rebuilt as a reminder of the older days.

IMMIGRANTS AND EMIGRANT ROUTES

The latter half of the decade under review was marked by

11. The letter is headed, 2843 Washington Ave. Ogden, Utah, Aug. 4, 1922, and addressed to the writer and signed James Brown.

ever increasing emigrant trains on their way to California or Oregon. No matter which was their destination the earlier parties followed the Oregon Trail through the South Pass into the Basin on Bear river where it makes the elbow turn south to Salt Lake. These bound for Oregon would go on to Fort Hall, while the California bound would follow down Bear river to within some ten miles of Salt Lake and then turn west to the Humboldt river. These emigrants, however, made no new discoveries, and in general made but little contribution to the Great Basin history. With a few marked exceptions, therefore, it will not be necessary to enter into detail concerning them. A summary view is all that the case requires.

The first company to enter the Bear river valley and blaze a wagon road near to the head waters of the Humboldt river was the Bartleson-Bidwell Company in 1841. This company was, in its origin and in its journey, one of the most interesting of all the emigration parties. It was the outgrowth of a new born enthusiasm in Platte County, Missouri, resulting from the letters and speeches of such zealots as Thomas Larkin, Dr. Marsh, Hall J. Kelley, the New England school teacher, Thomas Farnham and others who were unstinted in their praise of California and Oregon especially the former. It is said that no one contributed more to this California mania than the trapper

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Robidoux, who in speaking before a congregation of Platte County patrons told the story of the Missourian who came to California with the chills --- the only one that ever had the chills and fever in California --- and became such a curiosity that people walked eighteen

12. See Cleveland, California, p. 99.

miles from Monterey to see him shake. His description of the wonders of the country in general was on a par with this. Such glowing accounts backed as they were by the propaganda of the Western Emigration Society founded in 1840, and further reenforced by stories of fur traders and trappers, who were continually coming in from the west to the Missouri border, fired the imagination of the restless frontiersmen who were ever on the alert for new adventures away from the centers of civilization.

Among those whose minds were fired with the new enthusiasm, was John Bidwell, a young man only twenty years old, who had recently come to Missouri from Ohio for his health and for wider opportunity. The Emigration Society had in the fall of 1840 circulated a petition binding the signers to meet at Sapling Grove in Kansas the following May ready to start for California. More than five hundred signed the circular, but at the appointed time of meeting only one of the original signers appeared, and that was John Bidwell, who later received the title "**Prince of California Pioneers.**" It seems that in the intervening time a counter propaganda had been launched, which greatly cooled the ardor that had been impulsively aroused a few months before. One of the counter arguments used was the difficulties of the route.

Nevertheless, a company of sixty nine was formed among whom young Bidwell was the most resolute and persistent. But how little they knew of the country beyond the Rocky Mountains! It seems the information of the fur traders was not sufficiently diffused. Neither the Callatin nor the Bonneville map was used, but on the contrary the Finley map of 1826, from which Bidwell drew the information that there was in the vicinity where Salt Lake now is a lake "three

or four hundred miles in extent, narrow and with two outlets, both running into the Pacific Ocean." Bidwell was even advised to take tools along in case there came a need to make canoes to navigate one of these rivers.

With such vague notions then the party started out on their long journey. They were fortunate, however, in having for guides, Thomas Fitzpatrick and Father De Smet, the Catholic missionary whose numerous journeys mark an import chapter in Western history. Nothing of great moment occurred until they reached Soda Springs near Bear river. Here the main part of the company together with the two guides decided to go to Oregon and accordingly turned their faces in the direction of Fort Hall. This left the remainder, thirty two in all including one woman, a Mrs. Kelsey and a child, to make their way over the least known portion of the journey, without guide or compass. This they determined to do despite all difficulties and discouragements. Among those who so decided was, of course, Bidwell.

Before starting out on this hazardous part of the journey, they sought all the information possible, even sending four men to Fort Hall to learn further details. While Ogden had been back and forth over the region they were to travel, and the Walker company of 1833-1834 had pioneered the way, there was as yet no printed guide giving the results of these experiences, and seemingly even the Hudson Bay people at Fort Hall could give but little light. "Go to the south near the border of Salt Lake", they were instructed, and "then turn west till you find Mary's river which can be easily followed." They were warned not to go too far south into the desert nor too far north into the hills and

canons that led to the Snake. These instructions they followed as best they could and with comparatively good success.

Bidwell gives enlightening descriptions of the country and interesting details of the journey. They endured many hardships, going some times twenty-four hours without water, in the parched deserts, sometimes being misled by the deceptive mirage, and at times being disturbed by dissension in the party. Bartlesen, who was chosen captain of the company, not because of any fitness, but to hold him and his following, proved an indifferent leader, unconcerned about any one but himself.¹³ At one time he in company with seven others left the company behind and tried to find an easy route for themselves. Later, however, they were glad to rejoin the group.

It was late September before they reached the Humboldt sink. It began to be evident that they must lighten up their burden if they succeeded in crossing the Sierras before winter snows hedged them in the mountains. They now decided to leave their wagons, which it will be recalled they had brought all the way from Missouri river --- the first to pass over this dreary Utah-Nevada desert region intervening between Salt Lake and the Humboldt.

Packs now take the place of wagons and the journey is resumed. Now to pack animals so that the load will balance and carry without turning from side to side and causing no end of trouble, is a knack in itself. The men were new at this work, and the animals untrained. Bidwell has some amusing incidents to tell of the antics of the horses and mules under their unaccustomed load. But in spite of stampedes

13. Bidwell says, "Captain ~~Bartlesen~~, having got enough meat yesterday to last him a day or two, and supposing he would be able to reach the mountains of California in two or three days, rushed forward with his

and "runaways" that scattered things in all directions, the company were able to travel faster, and take short cuts over the hills and through difficult passes where it would be impossible to take wagons. But at best travel was slow and arduous, and difficulties were numerous.

It was more than a month after leaving Soda Springs before the party reached Humboldt river. With this stream as a guide they traveled on towards the Sierras with considerable assurance, although at times they doubted whether this was really Mary's river about which they had been told. For some distance in its earlier course it runs to the Northwest instead of Southwest as they knew its general course to be. But when it finally turned in this direction their minds were at rest. For nearly two weary months more they blazed their way before reaching the San Joaquin valley, California. As nearly as can be determined, they crossed the Sierras just north of Walker river in the vicinity of Sonora Pass.

This then is the first emigrant train across the Great Basin and the Sierras to California. It marked the beginning of a movement that ~~was~~ not to stop until this whole west from lower California to the 49th parallel became an American possession. It paved the way for future companies and indicated the road over which wagons could later be utilized the whole journey.

Joseph B. Chiles, ~~a member of the~~ Bartleson-Bidwell Company, saw the possibilities of wagon travel, and accordingly went back to Missouri in 1842 and organized another company to travel all the way by wagons.

13. (cont.) own mess, consisting of eight persons at a rate entirely too fast for the oxen, leaving the rest to keep up if they could, and if they could not it was all the same to him." Bidwell Mss. photostat copy, p. 16.

The party left Independence in May 1843, and reached Fort Hall without any startling incident. Here they divided, a small group under Chiles himself going north to Fort Boise, and from thence by way of the Malheur and Pitt rivers to Sacramento; over a new route about which little is known. In crossing from the Malheur to the Pitt a corner of the Basin was crossed.

The main company under Joseph Walker, the famous scout and leader of the Bonneville-Walker party of 1833-1834, took the then fairly well known southern route by way of the Humboldt, and south to Walkers Lake, considerably beyond the crossing of the Bidwell Company. Here Walker led the emigrants over the pass which he followed with his returning party nine years before. In Owens valley, however, they encountered bad road, sandy stretches and at times jutting boulders, which so impeded their progress that they found it necessary to leave their wagons, furniture, house keeping utensils, and the machinery for a saw mill with which they had left Independence. But they had accomplished the feat, of bringing wagons clear through the Great Basin to the very point of passage over the mountains into California.

It remained for the Stevens-Murphy party, in 1844, to complete the route with wagons to the settlements of California. This expedition followed the usual route to the sink of the Humboldt. The road was now pretty well defined, and little difficulty was encountered save that which would naturally and inevitably follow traffic over such a region as the Great Basin and the Sierras. From the Humboldt sink the company pioneered a rather new roadway directly southwest and entered California by way of the Truckee river. This proved to be the most central of the emigrant

trails, and the route later followed by the trans-continental railroad.

Bancroft estimated that approximately two hundred and fifty
14
emigrants came to California in 1845. These were divided among six
different companies, included in which is the Fremont expedition pre-
15
viously treated. These coming by way of the Great Basin are the
only ones that concern us here, and these require only summary mention,
as, in the main, they repeat the experiences of previous companies and
contribute nothing new. These are in the order of their coming; the
Swasey-Todd Company, composed of twelve or thirteen young men who
apparently followed the track of the Stevens-Murphy company and entered
California by way of Truckee river; the Sublette Company of fifteen
men; the Grigsby-Ide company composed of probably one hundred including
women and children, and the small companies led by L. W. Hastings.

Emigration continued with increased vigor in 1846. Indeed the
Missouri border seemed alive with the restless home or fortune seeker.
16
The discontented of various races and creeds, and of varying degrees,
of education and culture comprised the various groups, made homogeneous
by one common purpose, that of seeking the fruition of their hopes in
America's magic west lands.

Independence was a regular rendezvous for these gathering
groups. Marvelous stories were passed from camp to camp, and prota-
geinists of Oregon and California were competing in their appeals for
emigrants. California yarns, however, seemed to eclipse all others in
17
their magic lure. Edwin Bryant repeats one that almost pales into in-
significance, Robidoux's story of the Missourian with the chills, whom

14. H. H. Bancroft, History of California, Vol. Iv, p 571.

15. See Chapter VII ante.

16. Edwin Bryant, (What I saw in California, N.Y. 1848, p. 15) speaks of
rumor that there were five thousand Mormons crossing the Kansas river,
with ten brass field pieces and each Mormon man was armed with a rifle,

people in California walked eighteen miles to see because of the rarity of such a case.

Bryant refers to a man who for two hundred and fifty years had lived in the balmy climate of California, --- a land so fascinating that even the angels and saints were tempted to leave their blissful gardens and diamond temples in the heavens --- and then concluded that he wanted to pass to his eternal reward. His religious scruples inhibited the thought of suicide, so he was puzzled to know what to do. Finally a friend advised that he make his will, and then to go to an adjoining country. This he did and presently died. In his will, however, he required of his heir and executor, upon pain of disinheritance, the duty of burying his remains in his own home land. This obligation was faithfully fulfilled, and the inheritor settled happily upon his newly acquired estate. Soon however the zephyr breezes of California resuscitated the old man and with superhuman strength he burst open his grave and once more appeared on the scene, hearty and well. He now concluded to live his time out greatly to the disappointment of the heir.

But whatever the lure thousands traveled the plains in the summer of 1846, their faces fixed towards the setting sun, which was to them the dawn on new born hopes. Many of these passed through the Great Basin, some by the usual route, making no new discoveries de-

16. (cont.) with ten brass field pieces and a brace of pistols. Cf Francis K. Parkman, The Oregon Trail, Chap. I. Parkman gives the rumored number of Mormons at twenty-three thousand or more.

17. Bryant op. cit. pp 16-17.

serving mention here, and some by new routes which were historic in the later development of Utah history. These latter require some attentive consideration.

Among those who contributed to new discovery and to the pioneering of new and shorter road ways to the Sierra crossings were L. W. Hastings, Edwin Bryant, and the Donner party. These are selected because they left the beaten path and helped to establish a new road from the Green river into the basin --- a road the Mormon emigrants were later to take in entering the Salt Lake valley. Hastings, in collusion with Bridger and some others at Fort Bridger was the one to initiate this new movement. Judged too, as an effort to turn the tide of emigration californiaward, he was backed by Sutter and the partisans at his fort at New Helvetia.

Hastings himself seems to be a sort of filibustering advertiser after the order of the modern "blue sky" exploiter. He was back and forth along the road urging with persuasive stories, California and the shorter route.

Fremont had previously explored a part of the course. It was a deviation woutwest to Fort Bridger and from thence west and southwest over the Wasatch and down the Ogden or Weber streams to Salt Lake and thence around the south end of the lake to connect with the main road to the Humboldt. It was considerably shorter, but in some parts extremely difficult and without a great deal of work. Practically impossible to wagon travel. It was this new stretch of road then over which Hastings this year sought to divert traffic.

He himself had led two small parties under Harlan and Young over

the new route. They encountered considerable trouble in getting the wagons through, but after a great deal of meandering and cross wandering they finally reached the Salt Lake desert. Here again more trouble awaited them; they lost many of their livestock, and suffered from thirst and heat. Eventually, however, they reached the Humboldt trail, but were the last to cross the Sierras that season. These people then hold the unique distinction of being the first to take wagons over the Wasatch and down the east-southeast border of Salt Lake. Their experiences were such as to lead Hastings to write a letter to the Donner party advising a modification of the route to avoid the almost insurmountable obstacles of Weaber canon. But of this more later.

Edwin Bryant, whose book "What I saw in California" is one of the most interesting and valuable of this period accompanied a small group over this same course, and wrote valuable descriptions of the surrounding region. He, however, was suspicious of this new route and upon starting out wrote letters to his friends strongly advising against attempting it with wagons. These letters it seems were not delivered. Had they been it is just possible there would have been no Donner party tragedy.

The Bryant party were all men, traveled without wagons or encumbrances other than their necessary supplies carried by pack mules. They could therefore afford to hazard more and brave the dangers of new explorations over a rugged and but little known tract. Even thus mounted and equipped they found it impossible to get through the rugged defiles of Ogden and Weber Canons and had to make numerous detours. They finally made their way down to the lake by way of the mouth of the

Weber river.

Bryant's description of the country over which he traveled is strikingly suggestive. Their route south to Hot Springs, now a favorite bathing resort, was over a fertile region now occupied by thriving towns, such as Kayville, Centerville, Bountiful, Woodscross, et. al. After crossing the Jordan river, flowing north from Utah Lake into Salt Lake, they too head their course towards the Humboldt highway where we may leave them, pausing only to remark that they reached California via the central route.

The ill starred Donner party followed with tragic results, too, well known to need rehearsal here. They, however, more than any others paved the way for the Mormon emigrants from the head waters of the Weber to the Salt Lake valley. It was their delay in making roads over rocky hills and down canon defiles that brought the final tragedy. Nearly a whole month was consumed in tracing and retracing their steps, cutting out brush and trees, removing boulders and various obstacles, in a hopeless attempt to find a way down Weber or Ogden river. Parts of Weber canon were at that time almost impassable even on foot or on horse back, let alone with wagons. So in spite of the vague instructions from Hastings --- they had sent two of their number on ahead to catch Hastings and secure his services as a guide if possible, but had received only some rather indefinite explanations how to avoid Weber Canon obstacles --- they became entangled in the mountain fastnesses, and had to get out their tools to extricate themselves. They finally almost literally hewed their way from the mouth of Echo Canon up the east canon and over Big and Little mountains, spurs of the Wasatch,

and down Emigration Canon. This connects the party rather vitally with Utah history, as it was this road the Mormon pioneers followed the next year.

After reaching the south end of the lake, however, their troubles were by no means over. They still had over three hundred miles of intervening desert before reaching Mary's (Humboldt) river and nearly three hundred more to Humboldt sink. Another one hundred and thirty-
18
four miles would bring them to Truckee lake where they would be faced with the difficult task of crossing the Sierras.

Their teams were tired and worn down from their heavy work in the mountains; members of the company were worried and weary from the long nerve strain; petty strife and contention arose resulting in a homicide; disorganization brought about further trouble and loss of cattle, and finally, wagon after wagon had to be left by the way, leaving women and children to walk over the thorny road much of the way. Such was the bedraggled condition of the company when they reached Prosser cree, near Truckee city. Here the snow caught them, adding further confusion and fear. Instead of cooperation there was no almost complete reversion to individualism and self preservation, each family or group seeking safety in its own way. But by November first they had nearly reached Truckee Lake where they were forced by the heavy snow fall to go into winter quarters.

The suffering that followed during the next few months, and the tragedies enacted in the midst of starvation and death, are without parallel in the annals of American history. Here were exhibited some of the noblest acts of sacrifice and devotion, and some of the lowest deeds of depravity and degradation of which the human is

capable. Mothers suffered and died, that their children might live, and in some cases man was willing to lay down his life for his fellowman; In strange and lurid contradiction, man ate his fellowman. But,

"At the judgment lets be mute,
We never can adjust it:
What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted."

Of the seventy-nine persons who congregated at the lake in the bleak November, only forty-five survived. And what tales of suffering and torture of mind and body could these survivors tell! They had been through the shadow of the valley of death and had risen like ghosts from the tomb. Such are some of the tragedies, some of the heroism, some of the noble sacrifice, --- yes, and perforce, some of the brutal hardness of the pioneer.

Summarizing briefly the seventy year period from 1776 to 1846, we find the unknown interior basin has been explored and traversed north, south, east, and west. Its forbidding deserts have been crossed and recrossed, and its fertile valleys and productive ranges have been discovered and described. Pathways have been established to California not only from New Mexico by way of the Old Spanish Trail, but from the Missouri by the new central routes which are now lined with emigrants and traders from among the restless American adventurers, who press on and on to wider fields of conquest. First came the Missionaries, the padres, then the fur traders and the trappers, and still later the rancher, followed by the settlers, the real home makers.

18. See table of distances in Bryant's What I Saw in California, p. 248.

These latter, however, still looked to Oregon or beyond to Pacific California and their goal. In the face of these advances, the international struggle, too, is settling itself in favor of America. But the great inland basin is still awaiting the magic touch of the home maker and the industrialist to yield out of its boundless resources, the wealth of farm, and factory, and mine. The trend of migration is still over and beyond it. Why did the Mormons stop? Why did they seek this more isolated region of undeveloped wilderness? It will be the aim of the concluding Chapter to furnish a partial answer to this question.

Bidwell, John. A Journey to California, photostat copy in Bancroft Library.

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McGlashan, Charles Fayette. History of the Donner Party, a Tragedy of the Sierras. Truckee, Calif. 1879.

Houghton, Mrs. Eliza P. The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate. New York, 1911.

Important sources for this chapter, other than those cited in the text are: H. H. Bancroft, histories of (a) The Northwest Coast; (b) of Oregon; (c) of California; (d) of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming; and (e) of Utah.

CHAPTER IX

WHY THE MORMONS CAME

"The bottoms are extensive; water excellent; timber sufficient; the soil good and well adapted to the grains and grasses suited to such elevated region." "These words" says Charles M. Harvey, "put Utah on the map," the assumption being that Brigham Young was primarily influenced in his decision to settle in the Great Basin, by Fremont's description. This of course is an over-statement. The explanation, though suggestive and pregnant with meaning, is entirely too simple.

In attempting to show sequences and relations in history, it is well to keep in mind at the outset that every historical movement is a complex, that there are many and various factors, some of them decidedly elusive, that enter in and help to explain it, and that consequently no one set of circumstances can fully account for what happens. The most that can be done is to show evident connections and let the facts convey what meaning they will. So in reference to the pivotal point in this chapter, it will be understood that different agencies, some of them too subtle to be traced, influenced the Mormon choice of Salt Lake valley. Nevertheless, it will be seen that very important factors in the situations were the explorations, the reports, and the opinions of those who went before and who were in a real sense pioneers.

1. Fremont's description of Bear river valley. See, Fremont, Exploring Expedition, p. 93.

2. Charles M. Harvey, "Story of the Salt Lake Trail" in Atlantic Monthly, Vol. CVI, pp. 112-122.

Many and various explanations have been offered as to the motives, aims and purposes of the Momons in leaving the more thickly populated centers to seek an asylum in the hidden valleys of the mountains. It is not presumed that any great light can be added in this chapter, or that any approach to finality can be attained. As one studies the facts, however, it becomes more and more evident that the great Mormon Trek was neither a mere accident nor a sudden inspiration, springing, minerva-like, full grown from the forehead of Jove. It had its antecedents, both subjective and objective. The peculiarities of the people themselves and the events happening around them furnish the subject matter for study and inference.

But the Mormon people have always felt, and the conviction is a sacred tradition with them, that the Lord inspired the location, that outwardly everything was against it, but that the prescient eye of Brigham Young saw in vision the transformation of the desert wilderness into thriving villages and flowering gardens. Such material results,

3. For a scientific and psychological examination of the question by Ephraim Edward Erickson, The Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life. This is a thoughtful analysis of the problem of groups conflicts in which the Mormons found themselves, and which resulted in their migration from the settled portions of America. Compare Andrew N. Neff, The Migration of the Mormons, a Ph. D. thesis submitted at University of California, 1918. This is the most thorough and impartial study yet made of this particular subject. Chapter VIII, "An Exodus in Contemplation" is particularly illuminating on the relation of fur traders and explorers and their reports concerning the country.

too, coming in the wake of Mormon industry, and thrift, were regarded as confirmation of their faith, as divine blessings poured out upon a deserving people. Nor can one get away from the fact that this faith held the people --- strengthened mightily the ties of the group --- and convinced them through adversity as well as prosperity that they had really found the "promised land." In all their struggles this unwavering trust buoyed them up and nerved them in their arduous toil.

Moreover, this fixed belief in a divinely inspired home, a land preserved to them for ages, was reenforced by reliance upon ancient prophecy as interpreted by their leaders. The words of Isaiah wherein he says, "And in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the tops of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills," etc.⁴ was explained as referring directly and definitely to the modern Zion in the Rocky Mountains. And still another. Jacob in blessing his twelve sons declared Joseph to be a "fruitful bough by a well whose branches ran over the wall and whose blessings should extend even to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills."⁵ The "everlasting hills" were interpreted to mean the Rocky mountains, which from Palestine represented the utmost bounds in distance. The people of whom the Book of Mormon treats were descendants of Joseph and the branches that ran over

4. Isaiah, 4:2

5. Gen. 49: 22, 26.

6

the wall. Such is some of the clever manipulating of Bible prophecies to prove that the movements and location of Latter-day Saints were divinely appointed and fixed centuries before the events transpired. To be sure, such explanations were an after-thought made to do service subsequent to the occurrences themselves, but they were effective in convincing the people that they were led, not just like Israel, by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, but, nevertheless, by a modern Moses who guided them over untrodden paths into an unknown wilderness set aside for their habitation.

Nor is this all. Joseph Smith, the prophet founder of the Mormon faith had caught the spirit of the divine purpose as a pre-saged in ancient scripture, and had prophesied as early as 1842 that the saints would yet go to the Rocky mountains and there become a great and a mighty people.⁷ Then when Brigham Young, viewing Salt Lake valley for the first time, made the historic remark "the very place"⁸ the answer to the question why they came was conclusive. God had designed and preserved this isolated, unattractive region for His people in these latter days. At His touch the barren wastes would be transformed into blooming gardens. Orson F. Whitney,⁹ in the imagery of eloquent poetic prose, thus reflects the picture:

6. Orson Pratt's works, pp. 22-92.

7. Orson F. Whitney, History of Utah, 4 Vols., S.L.C. 1894-1902. Vol. 1, p. 195.

8. Ibid. p. 327.

9. Whitney, op. cit. p. 326-327.

"The Pioneer chieftain (Brigham Young) sweeps with a prescient glance the gorgeous panorama spread out before him, --- the contrasted splendors of mountain, valley, lake and stream, glorious and glittering in the summer sunlight. Far over and beyond all these extends that inspired gaze. It sees not merely the present, but the future; not only that which is, but that which is to be, when from these barren sands shall rise as rose proud Venice from the sea, a city fair as Adriatic's island queen, and no less wealthy, famed and powerful. It sees the burning plains to blooming gardens turn; the desert change to an oasis; the Sterile valley the reproach of Nature, which naught before had borne, teeming with varied life and yielding rich fruits and rare flowers for the sustenance and delight of man. An inanimate Sarah, a barren Rachel, transformed by the touch of God to a joyful mother of children. The curse of centuries is lifted, the fetters of ages are stricken off, and the redeemed earth, like a freed captive, looks up to heaven and smiles ... Egypt, the wilderness, are past; another Canaan appears; and here a Moses who, shall smite the rock, a Joshua to sit in judgment and divide Israel his inheritance."

Such is the traditional Mormon Viewpoint, and it has been a powerful motive in the redemption of the waste places.

But despite their spiritual idealism, the Mormons have always been noted for their intense practicality. In fact their history is and must be read in the light of their material achievements. Their

leaders in particular have been men of great practical wisdom. Especially is this true of those who led the migration to Utah. They

conceived the function of a prophet to be that of seeing remote ends and of choosing, in the light of actual circumstances, the agencies most likely to secure them. Their predictions and their projected aims were not a sudden inspiration, but a balanced judgment based upon well-considered possibilities of alternative action. So in this case they led their people to the Utah basin only after gaining all the information possible concerning it, both from personal contact and conversation with fur traders, trappers and explorers, and from reading their stories and official reports.

Without going into any extended academic argument in which it would not be proper here to engage, it may be said with comparative safety that the Mormons had two great objectives in seeking out their new home; first, isolation, and second, a terrestrial paradise. In other words, they wanted to get away from the people and the government with whom they had found an incompatibility so serious as to lead to violent and antagonism; and at the same time, they desired to find a place large enough and sufficiently productive to justify the hope of developing within it a strong, prosperous, happy and independent people. They had made themselves a peculiar, an exclusive people specially commissioned with the plan of salvation. They made the bold, and to all people except themselves, the most presumptuous

10. I do not wish to convey the idea here that the Mormons conceived the thought of complete and permanent separation from the nation from which they were now fleeing as exiles (See John Taylor in Nauvoo Neighbor, Oct. 29, 1845). They probably looked forward to a period in which they would be entirely free from external control or interference of any kind, during which time they would develop a sovereign state dominated by themselves, to be sure, but a state later to become a member in the sisterhood of states. Failing in this, they may have expected to perpetuate an in-

claim that theirs was the only true church, and that all who were arrayed against them were inspired by his Satanic Majesty. With this vigorous challenge to the orthodoxy of the day, they soon found their hand against every man and every man's hand against them. It had become painfully evident to them that, maintaining as they did with almost fanatical zeal, this unique position, they could not live at peace with their neighbors, and must therefore seek separation.

The country to which they were going then belonged to Mexico, but Brigham Young was no doubt prepared for the contingency of future American ownership. Indeed the Mormon people had become strongly imbued with the nationalistic and imperial aims of Joseph Smith reflected in the platform upon which he announced himself as a candidate for

president of the United States. But for the present, separation was a compelling necessity. Temporarily they must seek an asylum where they could become strong and mighty and then when the constitution

was later --- as they conceived it would be --- "hanging by a thread", they would come to the rescue.

To them the constitution was one thing, and the governing officials giving it practical expression quite another. Against the latter they entertained deep grievances and no doubt a spirit of disloyalty; but the American nation, an ideal state founded upon the

10. (Cont.) dependent government reflecting the true spirit of the Constitution, which they felt had been grossly violated by the states and nation in dealing with them. They revered the Constitution as inspired, but made a sharp distinction between that sacred document and the government. For a careful, judicious and thorough examination of this whole question see Andrew Neff, The Mormon Migration. Chap. VIII. Ph.D. Thesis University of California, 1918 Cf. Daines, F.D. Separation in Utah, American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1917, pp. 333-341, also Whitney, op. cit. pp. 334-335.

11. History of the Church of Jesus, Christ of Latter-day Saints, (Documentary) introduction by B. H. Roberts, Published by the Church 6 Vols, Salt Lake City, 1902. Vol. II, pp. 5-7, Cf. Whitney, op. cit. p. 22.

principles of an inspired constitution, called forth from them their deepest reverence and devotion. Some time, somewhere, they were to save this ideal state and give it concrete expression. Is this vast Mexican empire the place to develop strength to achieve such an end?¹⁴ Is this really the "Promised Land" prophesied by both ancient and modern prophets --- a land reserved for the modern Zion? How were they to know?

It has already been intimated that prophetic insight in this situation did not drop down from the skies, but sprang from a keen and careful examination of concrete facts --- facts which this whole thesis has attempted to exhibit. It has been shown that the Great Basin had, by 1847, been explored and surveyed almost from center to circumference, that reports and descriptions had been widely distributed, and that trails and pathways had been opened to it. Now what were typical reports concerning the region, and what was the concensus of opinion regarding its possibilities? How well informed were the Mormons in regard to the whole matter? These questions will now be answered more specifically.

Fremont's favorable description of Bear river valley and other sections of the interior basin, a description quoted at the beginning of this chapter as having placed Utah on the map, was not the general estimate of the region. Perhaps it would be truer to say that the discouraging and forbidding picture attributed to Webster reflected the popular view. He is charged with having said: "What do we want of this vast worthless area, this region of savages and wild beasts, of deserts and shifting sands and whirlwinds of dust, of cactus and prairie dogs? To

12. Op. cit. Vol. VI, 197-209.

13. The Constitution has always been revered as an inspired document, and from hundreds of pulpits the saints have been told that sometime they were to save it when "it was hanging by a thread."

14. Whitney, op. cit. p. 335.

what use could we put these great deserts or endless mountain ranges, impenetrable and covered to their base with eternal snow? What can we ever hope to do with the Western coast, a coast of three thousand miles, rockbound, cheerless, uninviting and not a harbor on it, what use have we for such a country? Mr. President, I will never vote one cent from the public treasury to place the Pacific Coast one inch nearer to Boston than it now is." ¹⁵ Of similar import are the characterizations of Senator

Geo. McDuff and Senator Wm. L. Dayton and many others who might be quoted.

¹⁶ Says Dayton, "the whole country is as barren as the desert of Sahara."

One of the most doleful and pathetic accounts was one given by Domenench, the German traveler. He says "the country in general is dry and sterile; scarcely any pasture or wood is to be seen there. The heart saddens as one penetrates into this strange and melancholy region A dismal silence, painful and awful, continually reigns in those regions; one would say that death hovers in that atmosphere without life or echo, and that ¹⁷ it prepares a grave for the traveler who may venture into them. It is seen by such reports as these that Long's designation of the prairies east of the Rocky mountains as the Great American desert, was later transferred to the interior region west of the mountains. In fact, various maps of the period so definite it, and it was so conceived in the popular minds.

15. Did Webster ever make such statements? I have not been able to find any such characterization of the country by him in his speeches or debates in Congress. However, various writers hold him responsible for this utterly inconsistent description. Could he between 1827-1841, while Senator, have soberly declared there was not a harbor on the Pacific Coast? Nevertheless he is so quoted though always without definite citation as to when and where. See Whitney, op. cit. pp. 288-289. (Whitney says the speech was made in opposition to a bill providing for a mail route from Independence to the mouth of the Columbia river. Cf. Sanders, W. F., in Historical Society of Montana, Vol. IV, 1903, pp. 123-26. Also Gov. Shafroth of Colorado in Great Debates in Am. History, Ed. Miller, Vol. X, pp. 114-116.

Brigham Young's prophetic wisdom was shown in divining the truth, in piercing this outward guise to the reality of things. But he had a far different picture from which to draw encouragement. The other side of the shield was much more appealing and much nearer the truth. The fur traders and official explorers, those who really knew the country first-hand and who paved the way for settlement, pointed out various resources, fertile valleys, good ranges for cattle, possible mineral wealth, etc. All these reports were not accessible to the Mormons, but it will be shown that they were familiar with the most important facts.

It will be recalled that Escalante, the first to enter the basin,¹⁸ gave a glowing description of Utah valley around the present Utah Lake. Likewise Fremont declared of this same region "this would be an excellent locality for a stock farming; it is generally covered with good bunch grass¹⁹ and would abundantly produce the ordinary grains." Even more flatteringly did he speak of the Bear river region, as has been previously shown. Years before this Ashley had said of the Weber river valley, "The country drained by those waters, which is about one hundred and twenty miles wide and bounded on the north, east and south by three principal and conspicuous mountains, is beautifully diversified with hills, mountains, valleys²⁰ and bold running streams and is in part fertile."

It might be remarked here by way of digression that the Mormons

16. See W. F. Sanders, op. cit. loc cit. For various estimates of this character one needs but read the debates in Congress over the Oregon question in 1820, 1824, 1828, etc.

17. Emanuel Henri Diendome Domenench, Seven Years Residence in the Great Deserts of North America. 2 Vols. London, 1860, Vol. I, p. 242.

18. See Chapter I p. 10 ante.

19. Fremont, Exploring Expedition, p. 274.

20. Dale, "The Ashley Narrative" in Ashley-Smith Exploration, p. 155.

were in Missouri when Ashley was elected to Congress. To further his candidacy much was said of his explorations in and knowledge of the west. The Mormons would hear these stories and of course absorb them with interest.

Nathaniel J. Wyeth is hardly less emphatic than Fremont in forecasting the future possibilities of Bear river valley. He makes the following pronouncement: "Bear river valley would afford a safe settlement from Indians and would have great facilities for producing supplies most required in the neighboring regions."²¹ It is well known that the Bonneville adventures present favorable aspects, so much so that his veracity was questioned.²² And so evidences might be multiplied to counteract the American desert idea of this region. Some of these will be brought out in noting the direct connection of the Mormons with the trappers and travelers.

Jackson County Missouri, was originally conceived as the Zion to be built up and beautified by the Mormons, and still many of them look longingly towards that center. But later in the midst of persecution and conflicts with opposing groups, they expanded their concept of Zion so that it comprehended the whole of North and South America,²³ and the Rocky Mountains became the place where they were to grow mighty and strong. So they began eagerly to seek information concerning everything western. Particularly was this true after the prophecy of Joseph Smith in 1842,²⁴ and more emphatically still after the martyrdom of their prophet in 1844. Growing hostility at Nauvoo,

21. Letter of Wyeth given in extense in Schoolcraft, Archives of Aboriginal knowledge. Vol. XI, p. 230.

22. He described the desert southwest of Salt Lake as sterile and parched, etc. but found beauty and promise in other parts. Irving, Bonneville, pp. 327.

23. B. H. Roberts, History of the Church, Vol. VI, p. 318.

24. Ibid. Vol. V, p. 85.

compelled them to reduce theory and hope to action. Living almost continuously on the frontier however, they had from the very first taken a keen interest in the far west, and no opportunity was lost to investigate its future adaptation to future Mormon settlements, as the following will show.

In 1832, a sixteen-page monthly, the "Evening and Morning Star" commenced its career at Independence Missouri. This was the westernmost newspaper at this early date, and peculiarly responsive to frontier news. In the very first issue Captain Bonneville and his expedition to the mountains was discussed. It will be recalled that Bonneville left Osage, ten miles from Independence, May 1st, 1832. In October of the same year the veteran trapper, Cm. L. Sublette returned to the Missouri with his packs of furs. The paper gave considerable space to him and his reports. In 1833 the Mormons were driven out of Independence, and perforce their newspaper ceased to be published. But wherever they went they soon established one; it was a part of their system of propoganda.

Accordingly after gathering to Nauvoo in considerable numbers they commenced issuing the Nauvoo Neighbor, the first issue bore date May 3rd, 1845. A. N. Neff, who made a careful and exhaustive study of the Mormon
25
exodus, went through all the files of this paper, and discovered fifty articles relating to the west. No important development seemed to be missed. The kind of clippings chosen are in some instances significant and suggestive. Among other articles was one from the New York Sun relative to the possible disintegration of north Mexico and the creation of new republics. A little later a full half page was given to a review of Hastings' new book A Guide to California and Oregon, etc. In August,

25. A. N. Neff, The Mormon Migration, a Ph. D thesis submitted University of California, 1918. Chap. VIII. "An Exocus in Contemplation" is most illumi-

1845, a report of Fremont's two expeditions to the Rocky mountains and California and Oregon 1842-1843-1844, fell into the hands of the leaders and of the editorial staff. After a month's study of the report, a full page account of his experiences around the Great Salt Lake appeared in the September 24th, 1845, issue. Apparently they were waiting for this full report of Fremont's, for they had led the people by various previous short references to expect it. As early as October, 25th, 1843, a two column summary of Fremont's description of the South Pass was given. Moreover, a few weeks later, the readers of the paper were advised the Wilkes' report would soon be available. Then in another issue they were informed that Fremont spent a week exploring Great Salt Lake. This latter notice was in the January issue, 1845. Soon after a rather full report of Fremont's exploration in and descriptions of the west were taken from Niles Register and given to the Neighbor readers. And thus was the attention of the people constantly directed towards the west, and its possibilities for a future home were indicated.

Now these items put before the people were far more than casual references.¹ They were published with real intent. The stirring episodes and tragic experiences of the period from June 27, 1844, the date of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, to the fall and winter of 1845-1846, brought matters to a crisis. Five days before his death, Joseph Smith with a few faithful followers crossed the Mississippi and started for the Rocky Mountains, where away from the strife and threatened violence the people might eventually follow. He was intercepted by false friends, however, and return to his death as indicated. It was now only a matter of time when the migration would commence.

25. (cont.) nating on this question. I have drawn freely from his findings.

In the fall and winter of 1845-46, preliminary arrangements were being made for the great trek. "And still more information California, that's the land for me. But it must be remembered that California in general terms meant the whole area between 42 north and Mexico and the Rocky and Sierra Nevada mountains. It has become already evident that in some sequestered.

Certainly one prime consideration is isolation, separation from the gentile world so called--separation at least long enough to become a mighty people under their own system of religion and government. Such sayings as the following illustrate the feeling: "all things are in preparation for a commencement of the great move of the saints out of the United States.. It is reduced to a solemn reality that the rights and property of us as well as the lives and common religious belief of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cannot be protected in the realms of the United States, and, of course, from one to two hundred thousand souls must quit their freedom among free men and go where the land, the elements and the worship of God are
27
free. Again, May God continue the spirit of fleeing from false freedom and raise dignity till every saint is removed to where he can sit under his own vine and fig tree without having any to molest or make
28
afraid." Brigham Young himself said in regard to a proposition one Miller made for the saints to go to the Nueces strip in Texas, "I told Miller his views were visionary. We should go to the Great Basin where we would gain a nucleus of power to cope with mobs." etc. From Apostle John Taylor this, "We owe the United States nothing; we go out
30
as exiles from freedom." And Orson Pratt speaks of forsaking this

27. Smith and Smith, Church History L.D.S., 1842-1870. Lamoni, Iowa, 1911, p. 162.

28. Ibid

29. A.N. Neff, Op. cit. p. 160. Young Ms. cited

republic, of being exiles of a wicked nation.

It is perhaps not to be wondered at that some rash and in - temperate speeches were made against those who were regarded as responsible for the woes and persecutions of the saints. Since the states denied them justice they conceived it the duty of the nation to interfere in their behalf. They did not stop to discriminate between the constitutional authority of state and nation in matters pertaining to civil and property rights. Hence the Federal government, too, came in for reprobation at the hands of a people feeling themselves the subjects of outraged justice.

But as against the stories that soon got afloat that the exiles were fleeing from the United States with disloyalty in their hearts, and with the intention of joining the enemies of the country in case of conflict over territory, the High Council of the church issued a circular in which occurred the following: We also further declare for the satisfaction of some who have concluded that our grievances have alienated us from our country, that our patriotism has not been overcome by fire, by sword, by daylight nor by midnight assassinations, which we have endured; neither have they alienated us from our country. Should hostilities arise between the government of the United States and any other power in relation to the right of possessing the territory of Oregon, we are on hand to sustain the claim of the United States government to that country."

30. Neighbor, Oct. 29th, 1845.

31. Times and Seasons, Oct. 29th, 1845

32. Smith and Smith, op. cit. p. 160. Cf. Times and Seasons, Jan. 20, 1846. Also, Niles Register, Feb. 14, 1846.

But it is not the purpose here to argue academically on the question; neither would it be appropriate in this narrative. The facts however, plainly point to the conclusion that, for the time being at least, the saints want to get away from the centers of population and authority, where they can manipulate their own affairs unhampered and unafraid. The Great Basin offers the necessary isolation, if only it will afford the facilities for prosperity. On this score they are seeking further information from the mountain men whom they meet on the way, the trappers and travelers who have paved the way for them thus far.

Even before leaving Winter Quarters on the Missouri, they received confirmatory evidence of Fremont's favorable characterization of the country. Father De Smet, the Catholic missionary who traveled so extensively in the Northwest, and who seemingly visited the Salt Lake valley, has this interesting incident to relate:

"On the northeast of the lake (Salt Lake) is the termination of the Bear river valley. This valley is thirty miles long by twenty-two wide and communicates with another valley (Cache) which is fifty miles by eight. It is this first valley inclosed by picturesque mountains, which has taken the name of the valley of the Mormons, or Mormonville. These two valleys contain the principal body of emigrants belonging to this sect (a species of socialism and communism) more than three hundred thousand in number. They (these two valleys) are capable in time of supporting over one million."

And then continuing he says:

"In 1846, near the frontiers of Missouri, I found the advance guard of the Mormons, numbering about ten thousand, camped in the territory of the Omahas, not far from the old Council Bluffs. They did not know at that time the goal of their long wanderings. They asked me a thousand questions about the country I had explored, and the spot I have just described to you pleased them greatly from the account I gave them of it. Was that what determined them? I would not dare assert it. They are there and the country has changed from a desert to a flourishing territory." 33

From Winter Quarters the pioneer band of 143 selected to make the advance trip traveled along the North Platte, the future route of the Union Pacific Railroad. They were not, however, blazing the way over an unknown wilderness as has been too often asserted. The course of the North Platte has been known and traveled for a quarter of a century, Major Long having gone this way 1819-1820. The Ashley and Rocky Mountain men used it 1824-1838. It had been somewhat abandoned for the South Platte, but was still an open way. The Mormons chose it deliberately for a number of reasons among which was the desire to avoid possible conflict with Missouri emigrants. Orson Pratt in his journal speaks of the good roads and the rich pasture for the animals.³⁴

Farther along the way they met some of the veteran trappers, notably, Moses Harris, Pegleg (Thomas L.) Smith and Jim Bridger. From each they made inquiries concerning the country to which they were going. Some of the answers were favorable and some unfavorable. But on the whole there was nothing very discouraging. Moses Harris's account of the Bear river country was in marked contrast to that given by Fremont, Ashley and Wyeth and others. In fact, he condemned it rather unreservedly, but gave a most favorable report of Cache valley.³⁵ According to Erastus Snow, Pegleg Smith gave a like glowing report of Cache valley. It was to Jim Bridger, however, they were indebted for the most comprehensive account of the whole region. Some of his statements were extravagant, and there were contradictions in his story, but on the whole he gave valuable and enlightening in-

33. Chittenden and Richardson, Life and Letters of Father De Smet, New York, 1905, Chap. IV, pp. 1403-1406.

34. Millennial Star, Vol. XII, p. 18

35. Whitney, op. cit. p. 315.

formation. Wm. Clayton, the historian of the company, thus summarizes it: "In the Bear river valley there is (sic) oak timber, sugar trees, cottonwood, pine and maple . . . There is no timber in Utah Lake only on the streams that empty into it. In the outlet of Utah Lake which runs into the Salt Lake there is an abundance of blue grass and red and white clover . . . There was a man opened up a farm in the Bear river valley. The soil is good and likely to produce corn were it not for the excessive cold nights which he thinks would prevent the growth of corn. There is a good country south of Utah Lake or Southeast of the great basin. There are three large rivers which enter into the Sevier Lake unknown to travelers . . . The three rivers mentioned are southwest of the desert. There is a tribe of Indians in that country unknown to either travelers or geographers. They make farms and raise abundance of grain of various kinds. One can buy any quantity of the best of wheat there. There is one mountain in the region and the country adjoining, in which he considers if there was a promised land, that must be it . . . He thinks the Utah Lake is the best country in the vicinity of Salt Lake and the country is still better the farther south we go until we meet the desert which is upwards of 200 miles south from Utah Lake. There is abundance of timber on all the streams and mountains and abundance of fish in the streams." And thus he rambled on. He expressed the belief that there were lead copper and precious metals in various mountains he named, but it is difficult at times to tell just what part of the country he is describing. On the whole, however, he pictures a

36. Clayton, Wm. Clayton's Journal, published Salt Lake City, 1921, Introduction by Levi Edgar Young. See pp. 273 ff.

variety of climate and resources. He is said to have remarked before leaving the camp of the Mormons that he would give a thousand dollars for the first ear of corn raised in Salt Lake valley. I find no such statement in Clayton's summary, but it is a traditional fact with the
37
people, and has been made to do great service in marking the contrast between the forbidding country as it was and the transformation into a garden spot under industry and divine favor. To his followers it was Brigham Young who, through inspiration, foresaw against all evidence to the contrary its possibilities and the blessings of the Lord that would follow the efforts of the saints there. From what has been presented in the foregoing, however, it is evident that Brigham Young and the Mormon leaders generally were seeking to reenforce their inspiration by all available human agencies and they were much influenced and greatly aided by the trappers and travelers who were in a position to give sound practical advice, and who had jopened up the pathways for them to follow. In this particular case much that Bridger said was favorable, and the side remark in regard to corn, if he made it, was incidental.

From Fort Bridger on the route followed was that of the Hastings and Donner party. Members of the latter group had worked sixteen days in cutting timbers and brush making dugways etc. from the mouth of Echo Canon over Big and little mountains down Emigration Canon to Salt Lake. So the Mormons were in no sense pioneers of the course traveled. That honor belongs to the trappers who had gone before.

37. Whitney, op. cit. p. 317.

The Mormons became "home makers" not "trail breakers". Much history had been made before they came and much was to be made after.

A few observations concerning their feelings upon beholding the valley and this narrative must close. "There is an extensive and beautiful and level looking valley from here to the lake which I should judge from the numerous deep green patches must be fertile and rich." Said by Wm. Clayton while viewing the valley from a hill near Salt Lake. Again he says, "I am happily disappointed in the appearance of the valley of Salt Lake..The soil looks indeed rich, black, and a little sandy.. Give me the quiet wilderness and my family to associate with, surrounded by the Saints, and adieu to the gentile world till God says return and avenge you of your enemies." Such are the reflections of the historian of the camp. These seem to represent the general opinion. At least it would so appear from the contents of a letter dated August 2, 1847, and sent back to the companies at Winter Quarters. Some of the extracts read: "Let all the brethren and sisters cheer up their hearts and know assuredly that God has heard and answered their prayers and ours and led us to a goodly land, and our souls are satisfied therewith.. We know of no one but who is pleased with our situation."

To sum up briefly, we can say that the fur traders and early explorers and travelers in the Great Basin, discovered the trails, described the river valleys, gave information concerning the climate and geography in general, and thus paved the way for future settlement. While they reported truly that much of the country was desert, they also pointed out the possibilities of the fertile sections and the product-

38. Wm. Clayton, op. cit. pp. 319. ff.

39. Ibid.

ive ranges for cattle. Their reports both oral and written, were eagerly sought by the Mormons who were to follow in their wake. While Oregon and California were more attractive to most emigrants. Salt Lake valley had much to commend it to the Mormons. It possessed the necessary isolation and was by no means devoid of resources. In fact in many respects it proved to be a veritable paradise. The sagacity and wisdom of Brigham Young in choosing among various alternative, the one preeminently fitted for his people may well be considered a reflex of divine guidance. But the fact remains that the wandering trappers and traders who challenged the rigors of the climate and braved the dangers of the savages and wild beasts, offered confirmatory evidence to inspiration and at every turn helped to give it a definite and practical expression.

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Popular account of Astor Co. and Astoria and the Northwest and Hudson Bay Co.

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Nuttall, Thomas

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Map of Utah detailed. --- Escalante River.

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